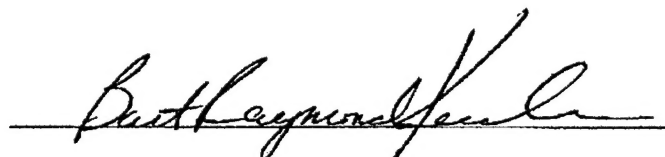


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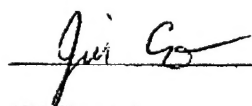
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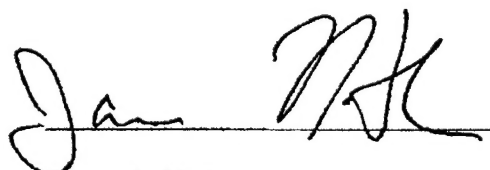
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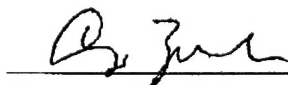
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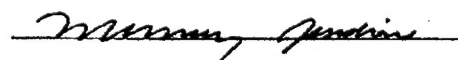
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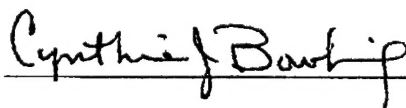
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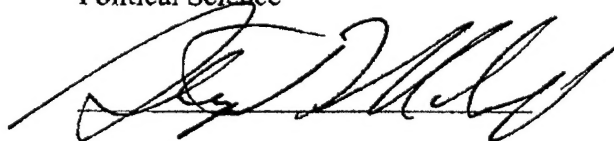
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MILITARY INTERVENTION: A COLD WAR ASSESSMENT
OF THE *"ESSENCE" OF DECISION*

Bart Raymond Kessler

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The views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

MILITARY INTERVENTION: A COLD WAR ASSESSMENT
OF THE “*ESSENCE*” OF *DECISION*

Bart Raymond Kessler

Doctor of Philosophy, August 4, 2003
(M.B.A., Florida Institute of Technology, 1985)
(B.S., Duke University, 1983)

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The decision to militarily intervene in an international crisis is one fraught with complexity and uncertainty, and may ultimately lead a state to war. This research provides an analytical approach—based on the work of Graham Allison in *Essence of Decision*—to help understand why states (specifically superpowers) choose to militarily intervene in certain international crises and not others. The modified Allisonian construct presented in this study synthesizes national, organizational and individual level factors into one integrated framework. That framework is then used to comparatively analyze two important Cold War era superpower interventions—the U.S.-led intervention at the Bay of Pigs and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The case studies indicate that despite significantly different political systems and governmental structures, the basic determinants of military intervention were reasonably consistent between the two superpowers. Realpolitik spurred interventionary impulses; organizational factors highly structured the decision contexts and provided key decisional path dependencies; but in the end, the ultimate intervention decisions came down to individuals driven by multiple—and often competing—interests, with the president and general secretary reigning supreme in the process. Most interestingly, past intervention experiences of both the Soviets and Americans highly influenced the cognitive constructs that drove policy deliberations. Reasoning by historical analogy guided both the questions of whether to intervene and how to intervene. Past lessons linked perceived interests to policy preferences by providing mental causal models.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a military officer and product of the Cold War, this author has taken great personal interest in the military intervention decisions of the United States and Soviet Union/Russia. While the post-Cold War interventionary behavior—particularly of the U.S.—has been both intriguing and confounding, it is the high-stakes intervention decisions of the Cold War that provide unique glimpses into the realm of high politics. The decision to militarily intervene brings with it significant potential implications for a state, not the least of which is the possibility of escalation to war. All wars start at some point with the application of military force; and at no time in history was the prospect of war more frightening than during the nuclear standoff of the Cold War. The criticality of intervention decision-making arguably reached its pinnacle during this era of superpower rivalry. The danger of escalation to a nuclear World War III hovered continuously and ominously over the heads of executive decision-makers throughout the period. Despite the risk, though, we find numerous examples of U.S. and Soviet military interventions. What led those superpower decision-makers to militarily intervene? Was it a simple calculation of threat, interests, and risk, or something more complex? And, what explains the wide variation in types of military interventions during this bipolar era? Those are the basic questions this research seeks to answer.

Clearly, military intervention is not a new phenomenon. As intervention scholars Levite and Jentleson point out, “foreign military intervention...goes all the way back to the Pelopponesian Wars, when Athens and Sparta intervened in the civil wars and other political conflicts between democrats and oligarchs in other city states.”¹ In fact, Thucydides sought nothing more than to understand the interventionary behavior of the superpowers of his day—Athens and Sparta. With such a long history of the phenomenon, one would expect it to be both thoroughly studied and clearly understood, but Rosenau’s three decade-old observation that the “deeper one delves into the literature on intervention, the more incredulous one becomes,” seems no less relevant today.² Rosenau lamented, “For all the vast literature on the subject...not much is known about intervention. There is an abundance of specific detail, but no general knowledge.”³ While the study of intervention has become much more scientific and voluminous since Rosenau’s observations, there still is no general theory of military intervention that synthesizes the vast empirical findings into a coherent framework that consistently explains state interventionary behavior.

In search for a general theory of military intervention, I turned to Graham Allison’s seminal work, *Essence of Decision*.⁴ Recently updated, *Essence of Decision* provides both a widely acclaimed and widely critiqued construct for analyzing state

¹ Bruce W. Jentleson and Ariel E. Levite. “The Analysis of Protracted Foreign Military Intervention,” in *Foreign Military Intervention: The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict*, ed. Ariel E. Levite, Bruce W. Jentleson, and Larry Berman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 3.

² James Rosenau, “Intervention as a Scientific Concept,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13, no. 2 (June 1969), 149.

³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴ See Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); and the recent update with co-author Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1999).

decision-making; and as Rosenau found, “interventions are more exclusively a consequence of decision-making activity than any other type of foreign policy.”⁵ While intended to address broad foreign policy-making, *Essence of Decision* was fundamentally a case study of military intervention decision-making. The case, the Cuban Missile Crisis, represented the most critical military intervention decision of the Cold War—and possibly of the twentieth century. With the Soviet Union and the United States teetering on the brink of nuclear war, the decision to use military force had unimaginable potential repercussions.

The analytical construct used in *Essence of Decision* to explain the behavior of the U.S. and Soviet Union will form the basis of the theoretical approach of this research. I modify Allison’s three conceptual lenses to enhance what he got right, correct what he got wrong, and supplement what he missed. The modifications are focused on explaining the narrow phenomenon of military intervention decision-making as opposed to Allison’s (and Zelikow’s) broader interest in “foreign affairs” and “the wider array of governmental actions.”⁶ Before proceeding, though, it is important to explicitly define the overarching research questions and critical terms.

Research Questions

Specifically, I have set out to address two interrelated research questions:

1. *Why do states—superpowers—choose to militarily intervene in an international crisis?*

⁵ Rosenau, “Scientific Concept,” 166.

⁶ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, ix.

2. *Why do states choose a specific method of military intervention when they do intervene?*

The first question highlights the limited focus of this research. The unit of analysis is the state, and more specifically, states defined as superpowers. The behavior to be explained is the decision to intervene militarily; economic and political interventions are not included. The specific context of state action is in response to an international crisis. Inherent in the first question is the counter question of why superpowers do not militarily intervene in certain crises.

The second research question may seem secondary in importance to the first, but in fact they are interdependent. Yaacov Vertzberger in *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention* noted, "When intervention is a plausible option, decisionmakers face two interrelated decisions. They have to decide whether to intervene and, if they choose to intervene, on the scope and intensity of intervention."⁷ They are two sides of the same coin. "The question of whether to use military force can never be divorced from the question of how to use it effectively."⁸

Military Intervention

Why focus solely on the tool of military intervention when states obviously engage in other forms of intervention such as political and economic? Many scholars who have studied state intervention have used definitions of intervention that include

⁷ Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 139.

⁸ Richard N. Haass, *Intervention: The Use of Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 68.

other instruments of power.⁹ These scholars have chosen to cast a broad net over the intervention phenomena in an effort to explain why and how states intervene in the affairs of others. But the danger of this approach is that intervention, in its most general terms, becomes “practically the same thing as international politics.”¹⁰ Military intervention, though, is a distinct domain of international politics that stands apart—especially in the realm of potential effects—from the other forms of intervention.

Jentleson and Levite highlight two distinct analytical advantages—methodological and qualitative—to narrowing the focus of intervention research to military actions.¹¹ The methodological advantage lies in being able to clearly identify military actions—troop movements, bombings, etc.—over the more ambiguous political and economic actions. An example of that ambiguity is that some scholars have even argued that non-action by a state under certain circumstances can be considered intervention.¹² “The qualitative advantage is that of the inherently greater importance, in terms of both salience and impact, of military interventions.”¹³

⁹ For intervention studies that include military, economic, and political instruments of power, see Rosenau, “Scientific Concept,” 165; James G. Roche and George E. Pickett, Jr., “Organizing the Government to Provide the Tools for Intervention,” in *U.S. Intervention Policy for the Post-Cold War: New Challenges and New Resources*, ed. Arnold Kantor and Linton F. Brooks (New York: The American Assembly, 1994), 196; Peter J. Schraeder, ed., Introduction to *Intervention into the 1990s: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Third World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1992), 3; and Karen Feste, *Expanding the Frontiers: Superpower Intervention in the Cold War* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 39. For a study that includes military and economic instruments of power only see Patrick M. Regan, “Choosing to Intervene: Outside Interventions in Internal Conflicts,” *The Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (August 1998): 756.

¹⁰ Stanley Hoffman quoted in Jentleson and Levite, “Foreign Military Intervention,” 4.

¹¹ Jentleson and Levite, “Foreign Military Intervention,” 8-9.

¹² See Rosenau, “Scientific Concept,” 153.

¹³ Jentleson and Levite, “Foreign Military Intervention,” 9.

The military instrument of power is “arguably the most important” means of intervention and carries with it unique strategic implications.¹⁴ Military capability tends to largely define state coercive power. Roche and Pickett, while researching all means of intervention, note that the “critical underpinnings of interventionist capabilities remain military.”¹⁵ In addition, the use of military force entails great risk. “Unwise intervention can be costly in terms of lives, of resources, and of...credibility and honor.”¹⁶ And finally, as Tillema cautions, military intervention “immediately entangles a state in international armed conflict” and is the “instigator of all modern international war.”¹⁷ As a research phenomenon, therefore, military intervention clearly constitutes a “central problem of world politics.”¹⁸

The next challenge is to define military intervention. While clearly more focused in operational terms than general state intervention, military intervention can still be characterized by numerous variant definitions. Scholars tend to fall into two basic camps regarding the characterization of military intervention—those that focus on the intent of the intervention and those that focus on the means of the intervention. This author sides with the latter.

Those scholars that focus on the intent of intervention as the defining characteristic are generally concerned with interventions that seek to “interfere with the

¹⁴ Kantor and Brooks, 24.

¹⁵ Roche and Pickett, 202.

¹⁶ Kantor and Brooks, 40-41.

¹⁷ Herbert K. Tillema, “Foreign Overt Military Intervention in the Nuclear Age,” *Journal of Peace Research* 26, no. 2 (1989): 179, 181.

¹⁸ Rosenau, “Scientific Concept,” 160.

internal affairs of another country.”¹⁹ The purpose of interference may be defined as democratization,²⁰ revolution,²¹ or any other action directed at the “authority structure” of another state.²² Much of this literature is focused on major power interventions in the Third World. Military interventions in this context are viewed as distinct from traditional war. War is “an interstate conflict intended to transform the international order.”²³ Military intervention, on the other hand, is an intrastate conflict designed to affect the internal political affairs of a state. Jentleson and Levite summarize this scholarly distinction: “Both have consequences and reverberations beyond their principal domains—from the outside in and the inside out, respectively—but the point is not to define their limits so much as differentiate their epicenters.”²⁴

Those “consequences and reverberations” are what lead scholars in the second group, including myself, to focus more on the nature of the intervention than the intent as the defining characteristic. Military interventions, regardless of intent, are considered important because of the enormous potential impacts they have on the domestic and international stages. Whereas Jentleson and Levite distinguished between the U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War as foreign military

¹⁹ Schraeder, 3. See also Kantor and Brooks, 15; Jentleson and Levite, “Protracted Foreign Military Intervention,”; Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition: The Rise and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 14; Vertzberger, 3.

²⁰ See Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Anthony James Joes, ed., *Saving Democracies: U.S. Intervention in Threatened Democratic States*. (Westport: Praeger, 1999).

²¹ See Jonathan R. Adelman, ed., Conclusion to *Superpowers and Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 286-291.

²² James N. Rosenau, “Foreign Intervention as Adaptive Behavior,” in *Law and Civil War in the Modern World*, ed. John Norton Moore (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1974), 130; see also Rosenau, “Scientific Concept,” 165; Feste, 39; and Regan, 756.

²³ Jentleson and Levite, “Foreign Military Intervention,” 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

intervention in the former case and classical war in the latter, I contend that the distinction is mute when considering the decision to use military force.²⁵ “Questions of when, where, and how to intervene with military force inevitably raise basic questions of what our interests are in the world and what we are prepared to do on their behalf.”²⁶ Each international crisis presents potential threats to U.S. interests that have to be weighed against the risks of military intervention. That basic cost-benefit decision process is similar regardless of the intent of the intervention. What makes the decision context unique when considering military intervention—as opposed to other forms of intervention—is not the “epicenter” of the international crisis, but the potential “consequences and reverberations” of the use of force.

Several scholars provide military intervention definitions that center predominantly on the nature of the intervention. Tillema focuses on “foreign *overt* military intervention,” defining it as “all combat-ready foreign military operations undertaken by regular military forces, and only such operations (emphasis added).”²⁷ Tillema’s restriction of military intervention to overt operations unnecessarily limits the spectrum of military actions available to analyze my second research question. Haass presents a broader notion of military intervention, focusing on “the introduction or deployment of new or additional combat forces to an area for specific purposes that go beyond ordinary training or scheduled expressions of support for national interests.”²⁸ Haass specifically encompasses in his definition both the military actions traditionally

²⁵ Jentleson and Levite, “Foreign Military Intervention,” 6.

²⁶ Haass, 1-2.

²⁷ Tillema, 181.

²⁸ Haass, 19-20.

considered classical war and interventions into the domestic affairs of other states. In addition, his notion of “combat forces” is less restrictive than Tillema’s “regular forces.” For example, Haass includes the U.S. support for Cuban exile forces in the Bay of Pigs in his characterization of military intervention. Pearson, Baumann, and Pickering define military intervention as “the use of troops or forces to cross borders or the deployment of forces already based in a foreign country in pursuit of political or economic objectives in the context of a dispute.”²⁹ The key addition of this definition is the identification of the decision context—an international dispute.

To accurately focus the research required to address the questions put forth in this paper, the definition of military intervention must capture the broad essence of military operations alluded to by Haass, while also referencing the specific decision context in line with Pearson, Baumann, and Pickering. The definition presented in U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 1-02 comes the closest. This publication defines military intervention as the “deliberate act of a nation or a group of nations to introduce its military forces into the course of an existing controversy.”³⁰ With slight modifications, ***military intervention***—for the purposes of this research—will be defined as ***the deliberate act of a state to introduce its military forces into the course of an international crisis.***

²⁹ Frederic S. Pearson, Robert A. Baumann, and Jeffrey J. Pickering, “Military Intervention and Realpolitik,” in *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, ed. Frank W. Wayman and Paul F. Diehl (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 209.

³⁰ *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 12 April 2001), 268.

This simple definition represents four key aspects of the phenomenon in question. First, military intervention is a deliberate act that results from a decision on the part of a state to use military force. This demands involvement in the decision process by the executive decision-makers of the state. Military accidents or reactions to real-time events in the field while deployed do not constitute deliberate state acts of military intervention. Second, the full spectrum of military operations—from covert to overt, and from military aid and show of force to full-scale war—are encompassed in this definition. This breadth of military action provides the variance needed to analyze the second research question. Third, the definition also covers the introduction of military forces into any type of international crisis, interstate or intrastate. Classical wars and interventions into the domestic affairs of other states are both included. For example, U.S. involvement in Guatemala in the 1954 overthrow of the Arbenz regime, the support for the Contras in Nicaragua, and the Korean War all constitute U.S. military intervention under this conception. Fourth, the military intervention decision context is limited to events defined as international crises.

International Crises

The fourth point is inherently intertwined with the basic research question proposed in this study. That question limited the research domain to international crises. So, why the focus on international crises? Snyder and Diesing provide some useful insight: “Conflict is central to all politics, especially international politics, and crises are conflict episodes par excellence. Lying as they do at the nexus between peace and war,

crises reveal most clearly and intensely the distinguishing characteristic of international politics and the logical starting point for theorizing about it: the pervasive expectation of potential war, which follows from the 'anarchic' structure of the system."³¹ International crises reflect underlying interstate tensions that present the potential for overflow into the international environment. The importance of studying military intervention in this context is the potential effect—those “consequences and reverberations”—that the introduction of military forces into the crises can have on system stability.

Snyder and Diesing define an international crisis as “a sequence of interactions between governments of two or more sovereign states in severe conflict, short of actual war, but involving the perception of a dangerously high probability of war.”³² This research, though, adopts the more precise definition of international crisis used by Brecher and Wilkenfeld in *A Study of Crisis*. They present two necessary and sufficient conditions of an international crisis. First, there must be “a change in type and/or an increase in intensity of *disruptive*, that is, hostile verbal or physical, *interactions* between two or more states, with a heightened probability of *military hostilities* (emphasis in original).”³³ Here, Brecher and Wilkenfeld expand the domain of international crises by softening Snyder and Diesing’s requirement that there be a “perception of a dangerously high probability of war,” to simply a “heightened probability of military hostilities.” The second requirement is that the disruptive interaction between states “destabilizes their

³¹ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision-Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-4.

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 4-5.

relationship and *challenges* the *structure* of an international system (emphasis in original).”³⁴ It is this threat to the international system that makes the decision of a state to introduce military forces in an international crisis so interesting for research purposes.

A state considering military intervention in an international crisis may, or may not, be a direct crisis actor. If it is a crisis actor that state will be considering military intervention in response to a “foreign policy crisis” where the executive decision-makers perceive a direct threat to their basic values, a finite time to respond, and a heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities.³⁵ Other states, though, may also choose to intervene. Throughout history, major powers have intervened in crises where, although not directly involved, they perceived threats to their interests or values that warranted military action. In the post-World War II era, the superpowers have been uniquely positioned to act as third party interveners in international crises.

Superpower Intervention

This research focuses on superpower intervention in the Cold War era. After World War II, the strategic landscape took on a dramatically different shape than the one that characterized pre-war international politics. “For several hundreds of years major threats to world peace arose from large-scale intra-European conflicts. But the end of World War II and the wave of decolonization marked an end to European predominance in international politics.”³⁶ The multipolar, European-centric structure of the global system gave way to a bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁶ Adelman, 3.

Union. For nearly a half of a century, the two remaining military, economic, and political superpowers engaged in a global ideological conflict characterized as the Cold War.

In addition, the advent of nuclear weapons both defined a new order of military capability/power, and significantly raised the stakes of any potential World War III scenario. The destructive potential of escalating military actions was of a magnitude never before experienced. Prudent decision-makers considering military intervention had to take into account the risk of nuclear war. The overriding nuclear threat minimized the probability of direct military confrontation between the superpowers, but did not negate their intervention into the periphery states. As Feste noted, "Although the nuclear age brought more pronounced sensitivity and concern about the future of global war among political decision makers, nuclear capability also served to underpin the U.S. and Soviet stance as world leaders persisting in their doctrinal justification for global outreach."³⁷

On top of their nuclear capability, the two superpowers also possessed unrivaled conventional capabilities that provided global reach for military intervention. The "United States and the Soviet Union could act with the greatest degree of independence and autonomy to pursue their policy objectives with other states; these two powers alone enjoyed global strategic mobility and a military capability that made it possible for them to intervene in virtually any region of the world."³⁸ The nuclear age, the military supremacy of the superpowers, and the governmental instability of the recently

³⁷ Feste, 2.

³⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

decolonized states combined during the Cold War to create a strategic environment “that increased the temptation to deal with East-West rivalry issues through expanded interventionary policies...”³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., 2.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* has achieved recognition as a classic in the realm of foreign policy studies with scholars characterizing it as a "critical turning point in the study of international politics"¹ and "one of the most significant works in the study of international relations, political science, and the social sciences in general."² Whether or not one agrees with Allison, the staying power of *Essence of Decision* is undeniable. Allison's work continues to be the focus of many contemporary scholarly writings³ and has led to a 1999 second edition update co-authored with Philip Zelikow that expands the theoretical base of the three models and incorporates newly released information on the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁴

¹ David A. Welch, "The Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Security* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 142.

² Jerel Rosati, "Book Review of *Essence of Decision*, 2nd ed.," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (June 2000): 395.

³ For a sample of writings over the past decade that address Allison's three-decade old work, see Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding Decisionmaking, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 134-164; Lauren Holland, "The U.S. Decision to Launch Operation Desert Storm: A Bureaucratic Politics Analysis," *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 219-242; Paul T. Mitchell, "Ideas, Interests, and Strategy: Bureaucratic Politics and the United States Navy," *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 243-265; Len Scott and Steve Smith, "Lessons of October: Historians, political Scientists, Policy-makers and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (October 1994): 659-684; Edward Rhodes, "Do Bureaucratic Politics Matter? Some Discomforting Findings from the Case of the U.S. Navy," *World Politics* 47 (October 1994): 1-41; Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, "Rethinking Allison's Models," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 2 (June 1992) 301-322; and Welch, 112-146.

⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 1999.

While Allison attempted to apply his findings broadly to general governmental policymaking it is clear by the title of the book and the case chosen for analysis that the most direct application of his work is to crisis decision-making, and even more specifically, the decision to militarily intervene in an international crisis. In fact, the second of his three key analytical questions, “Why did the United States respond to the missile deployment with a blockade?”¹ directly reflects and integrates the two research questions posed in this paper: “Why do superpowers choose to militarily intervene in an international crisis?” and “Why do they choose a specific method of military intervention?” The Soviets created an international crisis when they deployed nuclear missiles to Cuba. Allison sought to explain not only why the U.S. militarily intervened as a result, but why the blockade was chosen as the method of military intervention. This tight linkage of research questions coupled with Allison’s notoriety in the field made *Essence of Decision* the logical starting point for my theoretical development. Allison’s stated purpose “was to chart a course for others to follow.”² My approach is to follow that course by building a theoretical framework that enhances what Allison got right, corrects what he got wrong, and supplements what he missed—all relative to the narrow research phenomenon at hand, military intervention decision-making. First, a review of Allison’s original (1971) and updated (Allison and Zelikow, 1999) conceptual models is needed to establish the theoretical baseline for revision.

¹ Allison, *Essence*, 56.

² Quoted in Welch, 113. Welch contends that “students of international politics have largely failed to take up Allison’s challenge,” 114.

Three Conceptual Models

Allison examined the Cuban Missile Crisis through three distinct “conceptual lenses:” Model I—the rational actor model; Model II—the organizational process model; and Model III—the governmental, or more commonly called, bureaucratic politics model. In each case, he described the theoretical underpinnings of the model then analyzed the crisis behavior of the Soviets and U.S. through that theoretical lens. The result was three relatively independent assessments that each provided unique explanations of the same superpower phenomena.

In Allison’s original work, the rational actor model (Model I) was built largely upon the foundation of classical realism. The state—viewed as a unitary, rational actor—was the primary unit of analysis. State actions were perceived as value-maximizing responses to a Hobbesian world. State choices were the result of rational calculations of threats and opportunities, national interests, policy options, and policy consequences. The state optimized the final policy choice in the same manner that the “economic man” optimizes his.³

Allison and Zelikow’s 1999 update greatly expanded the theoretical underpinnings of the rational actor model without, oddly enough, making any substantial changes to the central tenets of the theoretical construct. Rationality, in simple terms, remained “consistent value-maximizing choice within specified constraints.”⁴ And, in spite of their reference to variegated theories such as rational choice, classical realism, structural realism, international institutionalism, liberalism (democratic peace theory),

³ See Allison, *Essence*, Chapter 1, especially pp. 32-34.

⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 18; see also Allison, *Essence*, 29 for similar definition.

and strategic studies, the focus remained on the state-level rational calculation of threats and opportunities, national interests, policy options, and policy consequences.⁵

One of Allison's primary purposes was to challenge the predominance of the rational actor actor-based paradigm by introducing two competing theoretical "vantage points"—organizational processes and bureaucratic politics. These two models directly challenged the notion of a unitary state and highlighted the constraints on rational behavior. The organizational process model (renamed organizational behavior in the 1999 version) posited that policy actions should be considered less a function of rational choice, and more an "*output* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behavior."⁶ States consist of large governmental organizations that provide—through a division of labor—information on the crisis at hand, policy alternatives and corresponding risk assessments, and ultimately, policy implementation. Building on the work of March and Simon, Allison argued that rationality (if it exists) is "bounded," or constrained, by imperfect information (largely controlled by organizations), organizational routine and organizational capabilities. "Government leaders can substantially disturb, but rarely precisely control, the specific behavior of these organizations," a behavior that is primarily determined by previously established operating procedures and changes only gradually and incrementally except in response to a major policy failure.⁷ Allison also noted that organizations tend to bias information and policy options to serve parochial interests.

⁵ See Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., Chapter 1, especially 24-25.

⁶ Allison, *Essence*, 67; and Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 143.

⁷ Allison, *Essence*, 67-8; and Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 143-44.

While the core tenets of Model II remained essentially unchanged, some reviewers of Allison and Zelikow noted that the expanded theory chapter in the 1999 edition is “supple and richer than the 1971 volume,” discussing nuances such as organizational efficiency, organizational culture, and interactive complexity.⁸ In spite of the enriched theoretical treatment, the application of the revised Model II to the Cuban Missile Crisis is less convincing than the original due to information now available that dismisses some earlier arguments—such as President Kennedy’s alleged order to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey that was assumed to be ignored by the State Department and is now known not to have ever been given.⁹ The power of Model II is in its identification of factors that *shape* the decision process, rather than those that act at the moment of decision—a job better suited for Models I and III.

Model III brings the “politics” back into political science and the study of state behavior. The bureaucratic politics paradigm starts from the premise forwarded by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin a decade earlier: “state action is the action of those acting in the name of the state.”¹⁰ Individuals matter, and the interactions of key players within the decision process largely explain policy choice. Allison characterized that interaction as political bargaining: the “pulling and hauling” of senior leaders with diverse interests, perceptions, and goals. Here we find Allison’s famous dictum: “Where you stand

⁸ Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 146; see also Rosati, “Review of *Essence*,” 396.

⁹ See David Patrick Houghton, “Essence of Excision: A Critique of the New Version of *Essence of Decision*,” *Security Studies* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 151-78 for a thorough review of the lack of current support for previous Model II explanations.

¹⁰ Richard, H. Snyder, W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, eds., *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics*, (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 65.

depends on where you sit.”¹¹ A player’s position on an issue will be largely determined by his role in government. This is the most attacked proposition in the first edition of *Essence of Decision*.¹² Consequently, Allison and Zelikow retreat somewhat in the later version. While keeping the proposition, they qualify their stand, noting that “depends” never was intended to infer “is always determined by,” but instead means that “where you stand ‘is substantially affected by’ where you sit.”¹³

According to Model III, choice is a “political resultant” that depends not on rational calculation or organizational routine, but on the relative power and skill of the bargainers. Whereas the original edition primarily built upon the work of Richard Neustadt¹⁴ (while jettisoning his emphasis on presidential choice), the updated version refers to a virtual plethora of ideas and theories, discussing Alexander George and “Better Decisions,” Kenneth Arrow’s “Impossibility Theorem,” the “principle-agent” problem, decision rules, John Kingdon and “Framing Issues and Setting Agendas,” Janis’s “Groupthink,” and Pressman and Wildavsky’s concept of “complex joint action” and the challenges of policy implementation. This enriched theoretical treatment in the revised chapter comes off as a “literature review for the sake of a literature review” because little connection is made to the core tenets of the bureaucratic politics construct, which remained largely unchanged from the first edition.¹⁵ In fact, the following broad description of the bureaucratic politics paradigm has carried over word-for-word: “The

¹¹ Allison, *Essence*, 176.

¹² By Allison and Zelikow’s own admission, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 307.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹⁴ See J. P. Cornford, “Review of *Essence of Decision*,” *British Journal of Political Science* 4 (1974): 233.

¹⁵ Rosati, “Review of *Essence*,” 396.

decisions and actions of governments are intranational political resultants: *resultants* in the sense that what happens is not chosen as a solution to a problem but rather results from compromise, conflict, and confusion of officials with diverse interests and unequal influence; *political* in the sense that the activity from which decisions and actions emerge is best characterized as bargaining along regularized channels among individual members of government.”¹⁶ The key determinants of a “political resultant” are the primary players, their relative power and influence, their perceptions of national, organizational, personal and domestic political interests, and the action channels available to them.

In his original analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Allison clearly favored Model II and III explanations over Model I: “In contrast with the Model II and Model III accounts, the Model I version seems somewhat disembodied.”¹⁷ Model I gained more respect in the revision because of Allison and Zelikow’s admission that new evidence “shows a number of explanations in the original edition to have been incorrect, and others insufficient,”¹⁸ and because of a critical omission. Allison and Zelikow—counter to their basic research design—failed to apply Model III to the question of why the Soviets deployed missiles to Cuba, implicitly bolstering the impact of Model I.¹⁹ Regardless, Models II and III were still afforded more credibility by the authors. The next section culls out key aspects of Allison and Zelikow’s work that directly contribute to the study of military intervention.

¹⁶ Allison, *Essence*, 162; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 294-95.

¹⁷ Allison, *Essence*, 247.

¹⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed, vii.

¹⁹ See Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 146-149; also see Houghton for a thorough analysis of factual errors and omissions in *Essence of Decision*.

What Allison and Zelikow Got Right

Essence of Decision made several major contributions to the study of foreign policy that aid in formulating a construct to explain military intervention. First, policymaking can, and should, be viewed through multiple theoretical lenses and at multiple levels of analysis to enrich explanation.²⁰ Second, processes—particularly organizational and bureaucratic—matter.²¹ Third, the actors in those processes are driven by not only national, but also organizational, personal, and domestic political interests.²² And finally, traditional notions of rational state behavior are “bounded,” or constrained, by organizational and bureaucratic factors.²³

Multiple Theoretical Lenses/Levels of Analysis

Allison’s introduction and convincing use of three distinct “conceptual lenses” to assess Soviet and U.S. crisis behavior demonstrated the explanatory power of multiple theoretical constructs and the importance of intrastate level analysis. Allison sought not only to explain the Cuban Missile Crisis, but also to examine the influence of theoretical frameworks upon our thinking about such problems. He noted that each “conceptual framework consists of a *cluster* of assumptions...that influence what the analyst finds puzzling, how he formulates his question, where he looks for evidence, and what he

²⁰ See Ole Holsti, “Review of *Essence of Decision* by Graham Allison,” *Western Political Quarterly* 25 (1972); and Scott and Smith, “Lessons of October,” 680.

²¹ See Welch; and Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 164.

²² See Cornford, 234; and Welch.

²³ See Stephen D. Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)” *Foreign Policy* 7 (1972); Cornford, “Review of *Essence*,” 239; Welch, “Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms,” 118, 122-4, 128, 138-140; Miriam Steiner, “The Elusive Essence of Decision: A Critical Comparison of Allison’s and Snyder’s Decision-Making Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1977) 408; Houghton, 178.

produces as an answer.”²⁴ Here, Allison mirrors Thomas Kuhn’s thoughts on theoretical paradigms.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn described “paradigms” as “universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.” Those “communities” of scholars generally practice what Kuhn calls “normal science.” In normal science, the research questions asked are limited to ones that can be answered within the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological limitations of the paradigm. Kuhn further explained that, “No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all.”²⁵

Kuhn concluded that paradigms perform both cognitive and normative functions, and are essentially “prerequisite[s] to perception itself.”²⁶ Therefore, what a researcher sees depends not only upon what he actually looks at, but also his pre-established mental framework, or paradigm.²⁷ Initially targeted to the natural science community, Kuhn’s ideas have resonated within the social sciences. While social science—as opposed to natural science—tends to simultaneously encompass multiple paradigms, the research communities represented by each of those paradigms operate much like those described by Kuhn. The “proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds;” they “see different things when they look from the same point in the same

²⁴ Allison, *Essence*, 245.

²⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), x, 10, 37, 42, 24, and 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

direction.”²⁸ This is exactly what Allison attempted to overcome by viewing the same case from three different “vantage points.”²⁹

Why is this multiple-paradigm approach important to the study of military intervention? Because single paradigms such as realism—the international relations theory by which all others are measured—cannot adequately answer the two questions posed in this research on their own merits. Realism traces its roots back to Thucydides who attempted to explain the superpower interventionary behavior of his day—the Peloponnesian Wars. He concluded that, “The truest cause I consider to be the one that was least evident in public discussion. I believe that the Athenians, because they had grown in power and terrified the Spartans, made war inevitable.”³⁰

Thucydides proposed a simple independent variable—the perception of relative power. His power-based causal explanation hinged, though, on a very specific notion of the “state of man.” Hobbes’ translation of the “Athenian thesis” most clearly illustrates Thucydides’ premise that “honour, fear, and profit” drive basic human behavior.³¹ Thucydides—not unlike Hobbes in his work *Leviathan*—presented a theory of state action built upon an underlying, pessimistic paradigm of human nature. Man, and hence the state, feared the power of other states and pursued military action to preempt a threat to security. The Thucydidean framework subsequently structured much of the

²⁸ Ibid., 150.

²⁹ Allison, *Essence*, 245.

³⁰ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.23.5 quoted in Gregory Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 36.

³¹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.76 quoted in *The Complete Hobbes Translation* with notes and a new introduction by David Grene (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989), 44; see also Crane, 62.

development of the modern day theory of political realism which informs Allison's Model I.³²

Building on the basic premise proposed by Thucydides, realists generally view states as unitary actors driven by national security interests that rationally respond to the shifting power dynamics of the anarchic international environment. While not exclusively, realists tend to focus on classical interstate war as the primary research phenomenon in regards to the state use of military force. Why? Because classical interstate war is a research puzzle that can be readily addressed within the basic theoretical structure of the realist paradigm. Other, muddier, forms of military intervention—like the preponderance of those in the post-Cold War era—belie simple explanation based on the assumption that states act rationally in pursuit of national security interests.

When realists such as Morgenthau attempt to explain broader conceptions of military intervention, the shortcomings of their theoretical paradigm are exposed. In addressing the same two basic research questions posed by this author, Morgenthau stated, "All nations will continue to be guided in their decision to intervene and their choice of the means of intervention by what they regard as their respective national interests."³³ Morgenthau's assessment of the U.S. intervention in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs demonstrates the logical difficulties in explaining a complex intervention decision by a simple causal theory such as realism. Morgenthau concluded that the U.S. allowed the

³² Crane, 62-63

³³ Hans J. Morgenthau, "To Intervene or Not to Intervene," *Foreign Affairs* 45, no. 3 (April 1967), 430.

abstract principle of nonintervention to interfere with the achievement of a clear national security interest—the overthrow of the Soviet-backed Castro regime. He explained: “Had the United States approached the problem of intervening in Cuba in a rational fashion, it would have asked itself which was more important: to succeed in the intervention or to prevent a temporary loss of prestige among the new and emerging nations. Had it settled upon the latter alternative, it would have refrained from intervening altogether; had it chosen the former alternative, it would have taken all measures necessary to make the intervention a success, regardless of unfavorable reactions in the rest of the world. Instead, it sought the best of both worlds and got the worst.”³⁴ Morgenthau used the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 as a contrasting example of a state that got the prioritization of interests correct and succeeded in the military intervention.³⁵

Morgenthau’s explanation highlights the inherent inconsistencies and limitations of the realist paradigm when applied to “out-of-the-box” puzzles. First, the basic assumption of rational state behavior becomes suspect. In fact, Morgenthau essentially concluded that the U.S. acted irrationally when it failed to reconcile divergent national interests. In addition, Morgenthau seems to simplistically associate intervention success (Hungary, 1956) with rational state behavior and intervention failure (Bay of Pigs, 1961) with irrational state behavior.³⁶ Also, the paradigm provides no insight into why the U.S. acted “irrationally.” By limiting the unit of analysis to the state as a unitary actor and

³⁴ Ibid., 431.

³⁵ Ibid., 431.

³⁶ See Rosenau’s (“Scientific Concept,” 158) critique of Morgenthau’s circular argument.

limiting the motivations of the state strictly to national interests, the realist paradigm provides no theoretical mechanism through which the researcher can “peel the onion” to gain greater understanding of seemingly irrational state behavior.

It is clear, therefore, that realism’s theoretical simplicity comes at a cost. That cost is explanatory depth. Realism fails to capture the contextual complexity of the intervention decision process. To fully understand the U.S. decision to intervene, one must open the state-level “box” to reveal other units of analysis and determinants of behavior broader than national interests.

Kenneth Waltz, the father of structural realism (a theory that rests less on the assumptions of rationality and unitary behavior, and more on the dynamics of the international structure), readily admits that his balance of power theory of state behavior in an anarchic international system cannot, and was not meant to, explain the immediate causes of state behavior. He contends that his is a theory of “international politics” and not of “foreign policy.”³⁷ Whereas in his original work, *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz emphasized the importance of all three of his “images”—individual, internal state structures, and international anarchy—in explaining both the ultimate and proximate causes of war, he later dropped the first and second images to build his “ultimate” theory of structural realism around the third.³⁸ Hence, his theory inherently lost the capability to explain why states militarily intervene in given place at a given time.³⁹ As Waltz so clearly noted in *Man, the State, and War*, “the structure of the state system does not

³⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 121.

³⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954)

³⁹ Waltz, *International Politics*, 121.

directly cause state A to attack state B...States are motivated to attack each other and to defend themselves by the reason and/or passion of the comparatively few who make policies for states and of the many more who influence them.”⁴⁰

Allison basically turned Waltz's three images on their head. Allison's Model I reasonably compares to Waltz's image three, Model II to image two, and Model III to image one. Where Waltz latched on to image three to explain the ultimate causes of state behavior, Allison focused primarily on Models II and III to highlight the organizational and individual level proximate causes of state behavior. Waltz and Allison volleyed back and forth criticizing each other's approaches,⁴¹ but the bottom line is that all three levels of analysis are essential in explaining military intervention. Waltz had it right to begin with: “The third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results.”⁴² Other scholars of intervention and foreign policy echo this conclusion.⁴³

⁴⁰ Waltz, *Man*, 232.

⁴¹ See Waltz's critique of Allison's models (*International Politics*, 122); and Allison and Zelikow's response (*Essence*, 2nd ed., 404-05). In regards to explaining military intervention behavior, I agree with Allison and Zelikow's conclusion on that: “A theory of foreign policy is...an inherent and inescapable component of a theory of international politics; likewise a theory of the international setting is an essential component of a theory of the behavior of states in such settings. Systemic identification of causal factors at both levels is necessary to explain and predict phenomena in international affairs.” (*Essence*, 2nd ed., 405)

⁴² Waltz, *Man*, 238.

⁴³ See James Rosenau, “Adaptive Behavior,” 131: “The study of intervention behavior...needs to examine both the internal and external factors from which the behavior derives...”; James F. Voss, “On the Representation of Problems: An Information-Processing Approach to Foreign Policy Decision Making,” in *Problem Representation in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, eds. Donald A. Sylvan and James F. Voss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21: “A longstanding issue in the study of international relations is the level-of-analysis problem. The levels referred to are the individual, with possibly the bureaucratic level included, the state level, and the system level. Waltz (1979) has argued essentially that

Processes, Constraints, and Interests

Allison's treatment of the multiple theoretical lenses uncovers three factors—processes, constraints and interests—that operate across and help frame the seemingly distinct paradigms. Allison informs us first, and foremost, that processes matter. The “essence” of decision is found in the *process* of decision. The act of choice doesn't happen in a vacuum, but is the result of complex decision-making processes that structure the ultimate decision context. Allison's three conceptual models—as outlined earlier—illuminate three different processes that potentially affect policy choice: value-maximizing rational calculation, organizational routine, and political bargaining.

While realist-based explanations of Cold War foreign policy have traditionally revolved around the value-maximizing nature of *realpolitik*, Allison emphasized the importance of organizational and individual processes in shaping decision outcomes. He followed on the heels of Rosenau, who argued that “interventionary behavior” in particular is “more subject to the whims of individual leaders and the dynamics of bureaucratic structures than the diplomatic, economic, military, and political policies”

the distribution of capability across states is the most powerful determiner of what states do. Morgenthau and Thompson (1985) have argued that the state is the unit of analysis to use for the study of international relations, with power being the most important motivating force... Within the foreign policy decision-making context, the international system may be regarded as a constraint; indeed it is a powerful constraint. It simply cannot explain behavior, however... individuals do make a difference.” Patrick James and Athanasios Hristoulas, [“Accounting for Crises in World Politics: *Realpolitik* versus Internal Processes,” in *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, ed. Frank W. Wayman and Paul Diehl (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 76], in studying the basic research question, “What causes a state to become involved in an international crisis?” found that “foreign policy is affected by domestic politics, at least for the United States during the era of the cold war.” Their findings challenged “one of the fundamental assumptions of realism: the separation of domestic and international politics.” See also Paul F. Diehl and Frank W. Wayman, “*Realpolitik*: Dead End, Detour, or Road Map?” in *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, 247-265. They conclude that, “scholars look at multiple levels of analysis... to explain international behavior...” (263); Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, also addresses three levels of analysis—international, state, and individual—because he contends that “structural analysis in and by itself is insufficiently nuanced to capture the driving forces behind intervention policies.” See Chapter 5.

that conventionally dominate foreign affairs.⁴⁴ More recently, James and Hristoulas, who performed a quantitative analysis of factors that influence a state's involvement in international crises, similarly concluded, "crisis activity is likely to be a function of both *internal processes* and realpolitik factors (emphasis added)."⁴⁵

Those internal processes tend to constrain, or "bound" the rationality of the decision calculus. "Ultimately it is the decision process that is the key to understanding the choices made, but each decision is predicated on a number of domestic and international conditions that constrain choices and influence the decision process."⁴⁶

Allison focused predominantly on organizational processes and bureaucratic bargaining as constraints on the decision context and multiple levels of interests—national, organizational, personal, and domestic political—as influences. Processes, constraints, and interests will be further explored and more specifically developed across the three paradigms, but first a review of the central critiques of *Essence of Decision* is necessary to highlight what needs to be addressed/corrected in that reconstruction.

What Allison and Zelikow Got Wrong

Allison's contributions were qualified successes. Allison's three conceptual lenses—rational actor, organizational processes, and bureaucratic politics—highlighted the explanatory power of multiple theoretical paradigms, but lacked internal clarity and logic, encompassed too broad of a theoretical landscape, and failed in the end to provide

⁴⁴ Rosenau, "Scientific Concept," 166.

⁴⁵ James and Hristoulas, 77.

⁴⁶ Patrick M. Regan, "Choosing to Intervene: Outside Interventions in Internal Conflicts," *The Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (August 1998): 769.

an integrated explanation of the crisis. In addition, Allison's approach discounted the centrality of the president in the decision process and ignored the impact of past experiences on decision framing, especially through cognitive factors such as reasoning by analogy.

Model Confusion

The greatest confusion lies in Allison's formulation and application of the organizational process and bureaucratic politics paradigms. Bendor and Hammond noted that it is "particularly difficult to disentangle Models II and III."⁴⁷ Bernstein agreed: "*Essence* was sometimes unclear on why part of the book's narrative on the missile crisis or its findings on certain events fell into Model II and not Model III."⁴⁸ Compounding the confusion is the fact that after the original publication of *Essence of Decision*, Allison and Morton Halperin conceptually fused Models II and III into an integrated bureaucratic politics model in their joint 1972 article, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications."⁴⁹ In a prescient manner Welch lamented this change, "In reality, while the two may well operate synergistically, they postulate fundamentally different constraints on rationality and are worthy of the distinct development they received in

⁴⁷ Bendor and Hammond, 302; see also Welch, 118; and Bruce Kucklick, "Reconsidering the Missile Crises and Its Interpretation," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 519.

⁴⁸ Bernstein, "Understanding Decisionmaking," 140, 144.

⁴⁹ Graham T. Allison, and Morton H. Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications," in *Theory and Policy in International Relations*, eds., Raymond Tanter and Richard Ullman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 40-79; see Houghton, 178, for additional recognition of this change.

Essence of Decision.”⁵⁰ The second edition of *Essence of Decision* followed Welch’s guidance, once again separating the two models. Clarity was not enhanced, though.

The placement of the proposition, “Where you stand depends on where you sit,” in Model III contributed to the Model II/III confusion and created logic problems of its own. Do parochial interests rightly belong in Model II, organizational processes/behavior, or Model III, bureaucratic politics? Allison seems to waffle on this point. In addition, Model III indicates that individual perceptions of national, organizational, personal and domestic political interests all potentially influence political bargaining. So, if decision-makers “often do not stand where they sit,”⁵¹ and “some key participants do not ‘sit’ anywhere,”⁵² then what does the “where you sit” proposition tell us? While the second edition does soften this proposition, it still leaves these theoretical issues unresolved and unnecessarily creates ambiguity.

Surprisingly, some second edition revisions actually degraded conceptual clarity. Allison and Zelikow rightly identified domestic politics as a key motivator for Kennedy to intervene, but captured that factor under both Model I and Model III analyses. Under Model I, they note, “Given the heated Republican criticisms of Kennedy’s handling of Cuba, the president was sure the domestic consequences of inaction would be intolerable.”⁵³ Robert Kennedy crystallized the issue for his brother: “Well, there isn’t any choice. I mean, you would have been, you would have been impeached.”⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰ Welch, 118.

⁵¹ Krasner, 165.

⁵² Bendor and Hammond, 317.

⁵³ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 113.

⁵⁴ Robert Kennedy quoted in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 113.

President responded, "Well, I think I would have been impeached..."⁵⁵ These exact same quotes and similar central arguments are found in the later Model III analysis.⁵⁶ The duplication is unexplained. As Bernstein observed, "It is as if the co-authors are unsure about what Model I includes in practice, and how to apply their theory..."⁵⁷ Domestic political pressure obviously provides a strong incentive to act. But any theoretical framework that portends to address domestic politics must be conceptually consistent in the analysis of that variable.

Theoretical "Kitchen Sink"

Allison (and Zelikow) compounded the problem of conceptual clarity by attempting to encompass too vast of a theoretical landscape into the three conceptual lenses. While critiques have particularly characterized Model III as an "analytical kitchen sink,"⁵⁸ and a "grab bag of influences,"⁵⁹ the expanded theoretical treatment of the other two models in the revised edition makes them now equally worthy of those designations.⁶⁰ Bendor and Hammond provide some useful guidance on this issue that informs my later reconstruction of a modified Allisonian construct for military intervention: "An analyst must make some hard choices about what variables a theory should include and what it should exclude. It is often argued that there is a trade-off between explanatory richness...and theoretical generalizability...But...it is possible to include so many variables that the theory does not explain even one case well. A model

⁵⁵ John F. Kennedy quoted in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁵⁷ Bernstein, "Understanding Decisionmaking," 152

⁵⁸ Bendor and Hammond, 318.

⁵⁹ Bernstein, "Understanding Decisionmaking," 140; see also Hosti.

⁶⁰ See Rosati, "Review of *Essence*," 396; and Kuklick, 519.

that is as complicated as the phenomena it represents is of little use.”⁶¹ The challenge—to be undertaken shortly—is to balance explanatory richness and theoretical simplicity.

Lack of Integration

One way to accomplish that is to simplify the individual models, yet at the same time integrate their theoretical underpinnings and findings. This integration—or lack thereof—is yet another failure of *Essence of Decision*. While Allison alludes to the potential integration of the three conceptual frameworks, he failed to actually do so. In the original edition, Allison highlighted the complementary nature of the three: “Model I fixes the broader context, the larger national patterns, and the shared images. Within this context, Model II illuminates the organizational routines that produce the information, alternatives, and action. Within the Model II context, Model III focuses in greater detail on the individual leaders of a government and the politics among them that determine major governmental choices.”⁶² Miriam Steiner described this as a “Chinese box” approach where “the individuals at the center become accessible only when the international and organizational boxes at the outer and middle levels are removed.”⁶³ She contends that this structure inherently limits Allison’s ability to integrate causal factors. “The task of making analytically explicit the ways in which the individuals at the center, the organizations in the middle, and the larger context at the outer level touch and influence one another is quite difficult for Allison, given his view of decisions as ‘occurrences’ or ‘happenings’ determined by the external concatenation of separate

⁶¹ Bendor and Hammond, 318.

⁶² Allison, *Essence*, 258; a very similar description is found in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 392.

⁶³ Steiner, 406.

causal factors.”⁶⁴ This structural impediment to integration carried over into the second edition.

“Unlike the first edition, the new one makes a somewhat expanded, but still-incomplete, effort to present an integrated interpretation at the end.”⁶⁵ In fact, Kuklick argues that the “already muddied waters” of conceptual integration in the first edition “get muddier in the new book.”⁶⁶ “In the second edition much ink is spilled about how they [conceptual models] might be integrated, but the bottom line—as it was in the original—is that ‘multiple, overlapping, competing conceptual models’ are the best that we can do at this time.”⁶⁷ Kuklick concludes that Allison and Zelikow’s assumption that there could not be a comprehensive explanation became their own constraining “conceptual lens” that prevented us from truly understanding the missile crisis.⁶⁸

In the end, Allison perpetuated the very mindset he originally sought to overcome. By presenting the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis as three distinct occurrences when viewed through three distinct conceptual lenses without an integrated explanation, Allison inadvertently provided fuel for the ongoing debate between competing research communities. Rather than search for common ground, many scholars set out to prove the theoretical superiority of a one model/paradigm over the others.⁶⁹ But, as David Welch noted in his critique of bureaucratic politics: “*Ex cathedra* condemnations of one

⁶⁴ Ibid., 406.

⁶⁵ Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 146.

⁶⁶ Kuklick, 521.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 521-22.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 523.

⁶⁹ Waltz’s (*International Politics*, 122) argument that Model I is the only reasonable representation of international relations theory is a classic example.

paradigm from within another are epistemologically sterile, and have the unfortunate effect of obscuring the fact that light can be shed on the same object from many angles."⁷⁰ The challenge, then, is to formulate a theoretical prism that logically focuses those multiple light sources on a given case to illuminate the critical elements of the decision process and provide one integrated explanation—not three different ones.

Centrality of the President

After "where you stand depends on where you sit" bashing, probably the next most critiqued aspect of *Essence of Decision* was Allison's Model III depiction of the president.⁷¹ If policy represents a "political resultant" rather than a presidential choice, then the president is only one among equals in the political bargaining process. We know this is not true. Political bargaining may reasonably describe the mundane, day-to-day business of general governmental policymaking, but in the realm of crisis/intervention decision-making such as the Cuban Missile Crisis the president reigns supreme.⁷² Why must the president bargain at all?⁷³ Advisers may bargain with each other in an attempt to gain access/influence with the president. Ultimately, though, advisers *persuade*; the president *chooses*.⁷⁴ Consequently, Allison and Zelikow should have leaned more on the ideas of Neustadt.⁷⁵ The bureaucratic politics model of political bargaining does shed light on the activities surrounding the president and their potential for persuasion, but a

⁷⁰ Welch, 142.

⁷¹ See Bernstein, "Understanding Decisionmaking;" Scott and Smith; Bendor and Hammond; Welch; Francis Rourke, "Review of *Essence of Decision*," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 71 (1972): 431-33; and Krasner.

⁷² Krasner, 179; see also Rourke, 432.

⁷³ Bendor and Hammond, 315; see also Krasner, 166-68.

⁷⁴ See Welch, 132.

⁷⁵ See Allison and Zelikow's (*Essence*, 2nd ed., 259-60) discussion about Neustadt.

conceptual framework for military intervention decision-making must account for the centrality of the president and the ultimate act of choice.⁷⁶

Past Experiences

Political bargaining and presidential choice are inherently driven by individual perceptions of the situation. Allison and Zelikow point to organizations as the primary source of perceptions.⁷⁷ Many scholars, though, highlight the critical influence past experiences have on shaping mental images, especially in high-stakes/high-stress decision-making scenarios like when considering to militarily intervene in an international crisis.⁷⁸ Cognitive psychologists have shown reasoning by historical analogy to have profound affect on the decision context. Allison—in spite of his many references to analogical reasoning—failed, though, to theoretically capture this factor in the conceptual models.⁷⁹ As an example, Houghton notes that “the first edition of *Essence of Decision* is dotted with references to the analogy which Robert Kennedy and George Ball drew between the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the ‘surgical’ air strike...being considered...”⁸⁰ Allison concluded that the “Tojo” analogy “struck a responsive chord in the President,” significantly discounting the air strike option.⁸¹

⁷⁶ See Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 162-63.

⁷⁷ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 298.

⁷⁸ See Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 163.

⁷⁹ See Houghton (173-77) for thorough discussion/review; see also Rosati, “Review of *Essence*,” 396; and Allison and Zelikow’s (*Essence*, 2nd ed., 284-85, 329-30) discussions about the impact of previous experiences—China and Korea—on the Vietnam decisions, and the Bay of Pigs on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

⁸⁰ Houghton, 174.

⁸¹ Allison, *Essence*, 203.

Allison's theoretical omission of reasoning by analogy—noted by several of his critics—limits explanatory effectiveness.⁸² In the original edition, Allison hinted at the need to incorporate additional paradigms such as cognitive processes;⁸³ but in the revised edition, Allison and Zelikow stubbornly clung to the original theoretical construct—ignoring the large body of literature that matured in the interim.⁸⁴ What makes this particularly odd is that Zelikow himself—in collaboration with May on *The Kennedy Tapes*—emphasized the power of the Pearl Harbor analogy over the entire decision process, concluding: “Absent Pearl Harbor, the whole debate about Soviet missiles in Cuba might have been different...”⁸⁵ Houghton further indicates that “considerable evidence can be gleaned from the ExCom transcripts that historical analogies performed a major policymaking role during the missile crisis. Not just Pearl Harbor, but Munich, Suez-Hungary, Korea, the First World War, and the Bay of Pigs all make notable appearances in the ExCom's deliberations.”⁸⁶ The Suez-Hungary analogy combined Kennedy's concern for Soviet moves against Berlin with caution about an air strike. Kennedy—demonstrating the power of analogical reasoning—argued: “If we attack Cuban missiles, or Cuba, in any way, it gives them a clear line to go ahead and take Berlin, as they were able to do in Hungary under the Anglo war in Egypt. We would be regarded as the trigger-happy Americans who lost Berlin.”⁸⁷ A reconstituted Allisonian

⁸² Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking;” Rosati, “Review of *Essence*,” Houghton; Scott and Smith; Welch; Bendor and Hammond; Cornford; and Krasner.

⁸³ Allison, *Essence*, 276-77.

⁸⁴ Rosati, “Review of *Essence*,” 396.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Houghton, 175.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

construct for military intervention decision-making must account for this obviously important factor.

Neo-Allisonian Construct for Military Intervention

Allison and Zelikow—while not successful in their own right—recognized that the “best analysts of foreign policy manage to weave strands from each of the three conceptual models into their explanations.”⁸⁸ They note that the heady task facing the researcher “is to identify the most important internal causes, and delineate more precisely their interaction with external factors in causing important events in international affairs like war.”⁸⁹ Stand-alone, single-variable models will not do; neither will the kitchen sink approach. The challenge is to synthesize theoretical paradigms in a manner that balances explanatory richness with theoretical simplicity. The theoretical construct presented here does just that. It simplifies, clarifies and integrates Allison and Zelikow’s three theoretical paradigms/levels of analysis into a systematic framework that distinctly accounts for the impact of interests, processes, constraints and past experiences on the decision to militarily intervene in an international crisis. The resultant theoretical construct can be represented by a three-by-three matrix of intervention decision-making factors as shown in Figure 1.

⁸⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 392.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

Level of Analysis	Rational Actor (International/state)	Organizational Processes (Organizational)	Bureaucratic Politics (Individual/small group)
Interests	National security	Organizational	Personal/Domestic political
Processes	Utility maximizing rational calculation of costs/benefits	Routine Option search Information flow/control	Bargaining/Persuasion Choice • President/General Sec
Constraints	Realist tenets • International structure • Power balances	SOPs • Past success/failure Organizational capabilities	Perceptions/Cognition • Reasoning by analogy

Figure 1. Neo-Allisonian Construct

Each level of analysis highlights different interests, processes and constraints that affect the decision to intervene in an international crisis. Allison hinted at this type of model synthesis in the original *Essence of Decision*, but failed to follow through in the revision: “These three models of the determinants of governmental action do not exhaust the dimensions on which they are arranged. Along one dimension, they represent different levels of aggregation: nations (or national governments), organizations, and individuals. Along a second dimension, they represent different patterns of activity: purposive action toward a strategic objective, routine behavior toward different organizational goals, and political activity toward competing goals. It is not accidental that explanations offered in the literature of foreign policy cluster around these three patterns. But models that mix characteristics of the three are clearly possible.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Allison, *Essence*, 276-77.

In this description, Allison specifically outlined the basic structure of my framework. Across one dimension are the three levels of analysis—national/international, organizational and individual. Across the other are interests, processes and constraints—two of which he directly addressed—the processes of “purposive action,” “routine behavior” and “political activity,” and the “strategic,” “organizational” and “competing” individual interests. In addition, he also hinted at the need to incorporate alternate paradigms such as cognitive processes.⁹¹ What Allison failed to do, though, was to show how these various factors could be logically and theoretically integrated across the levels of analysis.

Basic Proposition

Integration requires capturing both the ultimate and proximate causes of military intervention into the same framework. The decision to militarily intervene in an international crisis is best viewed as a *process* that develops over time and is affected at multiple levels of analysis. Ultimate causes like those found in Waltz’s image three theory of structural realism and Allison and Zelikow’s rational actor model provide insight into which international crises are of strategic interest to a superpower and whether military intervention is a reasonable option. Realist-based rational calculations of national interests, threats and opportunities, and power dynamics reasonably explain a superpower’s desire to take action in an international crisis, but proximate causes—organizational behavior and bureaucratic politics—largely determine the specific nature

⁹¹ Ibid., 277.

and timing of the intervention.⁹² Organizational processes and capabilities tend to constrain the decision context by defining available options, controlling information flow, and creating path dependencies based on previous outcomes. But, the actions of a state ultimately reflect the decisions of individuals within the state. The choice to intervene or not, and in what manner, inherently lies on the shoulders of key individuals influenced by multiple interests and goals, perceptions, and political pressures resulting from bargaining and persuasion. Finally, throughout the decision process, past intervention experiences affect the selection of policy options and structure critical perceptions through reasoning by analogy. In summary, realist-based ultimate causes generally determine the *where*, organizational and individual proximate causes determine the *when* (if at all) and *how*, and all three together help explain the *why*, of military intervention. The next step is to more fully and precisely delineate these various factors.

International/National Level of Analysis

The international/national level of analysis is characterized by the basic tenets of realist theory and the *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy that dominated superpower interventionary behavior during the Cold War.⁹³ States act in a purposeful, value-maximizing way to secure national interests—predominantly security and power—in response to perceived threats and opportunities in an anarchic world. They are ultimately constrained, though, by the power dynamics of the international structure. Daniel

⁹² This proposition is similar to Kenneth Waltz's explanation of the interdependence of his three images in *Man, the State and War*, 1959, pp. 232 and 238.

⁹³ See Waltz's (*International Politics*, p. 117) discussion of *realpolitik* and structural constraints; Frank W. Wayman and Paul F. Diehl, ed., *Reconstructing Realpolitik* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-17; von Hippel, 169.

McIntosh, an intervention researcher, noted, "While the structure of the international system does not make intervention necessary, it does make intervention possible, and differing interstate systems are associated with unique opportunities and constraints." He added, "The obvious systemic influence on the decision to intervene is the distribution of power."⁹⁴ During the bipolar era of the Cold War, the two superpowers were uniquely positioned from a relative power standpoint to militarily intervene in second and third world states, especially where direct superpower confrontation was unlikely. Vertzberger identified three structural factors that account for the pronounced intervention activity of the Cold War period. "First, the underlying ideological dimension of bloc conflict...injected a sense of zero-sumness into superpower relations...encouraging intrabloc interventions to prevent possible defections from one bloc to the rival bloc."⁹⁵ This logic framed the U.S. grand strategy of containment. Second, the "nuclear balance" and fear of escalation meant that once one superpower intervenes, "a rival superpower is not likely to deploy troops in a counterintervention, although it may invoke other measures..."⁹⁶ "Third, the many newly independent states since 1945 have presented targets of opportunity," constituting "low-risk targets of intervention."⁹⁷

Allison and Zelikow, while referring to a broad spectrum of theories in their conceptual development of the rational actor model, relied, in fact, on similar central ideas as presented here for their case analysis and conclusions. They indicated that

⁹⁴ Daniel McIntosh, "The U.S. Style of Intervention," in *Superpowers and Revolution*, ed. Jonathan R. Adelman (New York: Praeger, 1986), 52.

⁹⁵ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 148.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Model I “examines the U.S. strategic calculus,”⁹⁸ by considering the “state’s goals (e.g., survival, maximization of power, etc.),” “threats and opportunities,” and the perceived “strategic costs and benefits of each option.”⁹⁹ But again, they presented this as an independent paradigm to be compared—rather than integrated—with the other two conceptual lenses. I contend that realist constraints and *realpolitik* primarily explain a superpower’s determination that key interests are at stake in an international crisis and that something should be done, but fail to fully illuminate the timing and manner of the ultimate intervention decision. For example, in the Cuban missile case, the detection of Soviet missiles on 16 October triggered an international crisis.¹⁰⁰ “The first days of discussion in the White House came to a near consensus that the Soviet missiles had to be removed.”¹⁰¹ This observation by Allison and Zelikow highlighted the fact that strategic interests were at stake and that action had to be taken. Realist factors reasonably predict this. But the bulk of the ExCom deliberations revolved around determining how and when to intervene. Those deliberations were heavily influenced and constrained by internal organizational and individual factors.

Several scholars have validated both the importance of realist-based interests and constraints and their shortcomings in explaining intervention behavior. Russell Leng concluded: “The realists appear to be correct in recognizing the salience of considerations of interest and power,” but the “realist perspective...affords an incomplete picture.”

Pearson, Bauman and Pickering, studying 600 cases of military intervention during the

⁹⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 386.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 389-90.

¹⁰⁰ See crisis description in Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 352-53.

¹⁰¹ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 225.

Cold War, found that “the practice of realpolitik” was a “prominent feature of the international system” throughout the period.¹⁰² Fellow authors in the same edited work, James and Hristoulas, concluded from their quantitative findings that “realpolitik variables are insufficient to explain something like crisis activity. A focus on internal processes, however, also is not enough.”¹⁰³ The answer lies in melding the two as presented here. The following section delineates the organizational variables that frame the final decision context.

Organizational Level of Analysis

Allison and Zelikow focused their Model II analysis on the presumption that governmental action is inherently an organizational output. They pointed to three aspects of organizational processes that account for this. First, state behavior is enacted through organizations. Second, organizational capabilities and capacities determine the range of options available to decision-makers. And third, organizational processes structure and constrain the decision context by controlling information and policy development.¹⁰⁴ The first precept refers to the policy implementation stage. The second and third precepts describe the policy formulation stage of the decision process. The problem with this theoretical construct is that it addresses what precedes and what follows an actual decision, but says little about the decision itself. “Belying the title of the book, Model II does not operate at the moment of decision; rather, it explains deviations from ideal rationality...by highlighting the ways in which organizational routines constrain the

¹⁰² Pearson, Baumann, and Pickering, 210.

¹⁰³ James and Hristoulas, 77.

¹⁰⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 164.

formation of options (emphasis in original)...”¹⁰⁵ In spite of their recognition that the “decisions of government leaders trigger organizational routines,” Allison and Zelikow failed to account for those decisions in this model.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the model can only account for distinct influences on the decision process, but not the act of choice.

Since my research agenda is focused on the *decision* to intervene and not the follow-on intervention implementation, I adopt Allison and Zelikow’s policy formulation propositions while shedding the rest. I contend that organizational behavior primarily constrains/bounds the decision process while still leaving significant freedom of action within those bounds to individual decision-makers. Much like the external power dynamics of the international structure constrain rational superpower intervention, organizational processes “bound” the rationality of the decision context. In large bureaucratic, industrialized nations such as the U.S. and Soviet Union, decision-makers turn to the national security apparatus to provide policy options for consideration. Those options are inherently constrained by organizational capabilities, standard operating procedures and organizational interests. Additionally, those same organizations control much of the information flow to the senior policymakers. Throughout the organizational process, policy development and assessment is influenced by the success and/or failure of previous interventions. Past successes reinforce standard operating procedures and previous intervention methodologies, whereas failures—especially major disasters¹⁰⁷—tend to force a reassessment of those past policies and open the process to more

¹⁰⁵ Welch, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 164.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

innovative ideas. Organizational level variables, while not fully determinative in their own right, do—like realist structural variables—constrain the decision context and provide critical insight into the ultimate intervention decision. Welch infers that organizational constraints can be particularly powerful in shaping crisis-related decisions, especially when considering “immediate large-scale military options.”¹⁰⁸

The two central organizational processes that affect the decision process are the search for policy options and the flow of information. Established organizations—such as those entrenched in the national security bureaucracy—carry out these tasks according to standard operating procedures (SOPs). SOPs tend to be inflexible. In high-risk cases “such as foreign military intervention,” Vertzberger contends, “it is unlikely that final decisions will be made through organizational SOPs.”¹⁰⁹ He adds, “Organizational inputs are, however, crucial in this process. Organizations collect data, interpret it, and disseminate it through a highly politicized process to individual decision makers. They may also define the problem and the relevant risk dimensions as seen from each organization’s perspective.”¹¹⁰ Organizational interests and priorities underlie that organizational perspective. Organizations tend to present information and advocate policy options that inherently favor their special capabilities and enhance their bureaucratic position. Finally, organizations—like individuals—are influenced by past experiences. “Lessons drawn by an organization from experience...will reveal a desire to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁹ Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger. “Collective Risk Taking: The Decision-making Group,” in *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy-making*, eds. Paul ‘t Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997), 275.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

avoid ‘mistakes’ of the past or a desire to repeat earlier successes.”¹¹¹ And, more specifically, lessons learned “predispose an organization to respond to future contingencies in particular ways—wisely or unwisely.”

Much of the empirical support for Allison’s Model II analysis revolved—in the original edition—around the policy implementation proposition. For example, he concluded that the Jupiter missiles were not removed per presidential order due to organizational inertia, and that the implementation of the naval blockade followed Navy SOPs and desires rather than presidential direction. Houghton contends in his detailed comparison of the 1971 and 1999 editions of *Essence of Decision*, that much of the original empirical support for these, and other, Model II findings have been “excised” in the updated version.¹¹² What we now know does not support Allison’s earlier contentions. What empirical evidence does remain—such as the Air Force capability limitations on the preferred surgical strike option—primarily supports the notion that organizational factors (capabilities, SOPs, and interests) constrain, rather than determine, intervention decisions.¹¹³

Individual Level of Analysis

The strategic environment and national interests influence a state’s desire to take action in an international crisis. Organizations heavily affect policy formulation through SOPs, information control and limited capabilities. But, in the end, policy choice lies in

¹¹¹ John P. Lovell. “‘Lessons’ of U.S. Military Involvement: Preliminary Conceptualization,” in *Foreign Policy Decision Making: Perception, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence*, eds. Donald A. Sylvan and Steve Chan (New York: Praeger, 1984), 136.

¹¹² Houghton, 153-63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 178.

the realm of individuals; and only a framework that highlights the distinct role of individuals can explain the ultimate choice of militarily intervention. Whereas my reconstruction of Allison and Zelikow's Models I and II primarily narrowed the focus of critical variables and highlighted their integration, my approach for Model III represents more profound changes to the Allisonian construct. This final segment of my integrated theoretical construct differs from Allison and Zelikow's Model III in three important ways: it emphasizes the centrality of the president (or equivalent), the importance of domestic political interests, and role of reasoning by historical analogy. Several *Essence of Decision* critics that have highlighted the centrality of the president and the importance of cognitive constraints such as reasoning by analogy have gone so far as to recommend competing Model IVs based on those factors.¹¹⁴ I think that the better approach, as presented here, is to adapt Model III in an integrated fashion to account for these critical "individual-level" factors.¹¹⁵

First, political bargaining is a reasonable characterization of the advisory deliberation process, but—like Neustadt's premise that Allison and Zelikow chose to jettison¹¹⁶—the final intervention decision is the choice of the president; it is not a political resultant of bargaining among equals. Advisers persuade; the president chooses. This is particularly the case where the decision involves the potential use of force in an international crisis. As Bernstein noted, "the president usually makes the basic

¹¹⁴ Bernstein ("Understanding Decisionmaking," 159) recommends a fourth model that focuses on the centrality of the president; Houghton (173) recommends a fourth model for analogical reasoning; for recommendations to include cognitive factors, see also Welch, 141-42; and Scott and Smith, 679-80.

¹¹⁵ As recommended by Rosati, "Review of *Essence*," 396.

¹¹⁶ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 294.

decisions—of war and peace, and of going near the so-called precipice... ‘Bureaucratic politics’—or put more broadly and usefully, the counsel of advisors the president largely selects—can influence how the president views matters and even what the *president* chooses (emphasis in original).”¹¹⁷ But, in the end, it is the president that *decides*.

While openly dismissing Neustadt’s emphasis on presidential choice in favor of political bargaining, Allison and Zelikow actually supported Neustadt’s cause and my approach when they explained the process of a state choosing military intervention: “For example, one action-channel for producing U.S. military intervention in another country includes a recommendation by the ambassador to that country, an assessment by the regional military commander, a recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, an evaluation by the intelligence community of the consequences of intervention, a recommendation by the Secretaries of State and Defense, a *Presidential decision* to intervene, the transmittal of an order through the President to the Secretary of Defense and the JCS to the regional commander...” and so forth (emphasis added).¹¹⁸ What they described is exactly what I outline. Organizations such as the defense and intelligence communities provide the president policy options, policy assessments, and advice. They act to *persuade* rather than to bargain. They may bargain with each other, but not with the president. In the realm of military intervention, the president and only the president ultimately makes the decision. It is an act of choice, not a “political resultant.” Granted,

¹¹⁷ Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 162.

¹¹⁸ Allison, *Essence*, 169; and Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 300-01.

politics matter,¹¹⁹ but in the sense of persuasion and domestic political pressure, not in the sense of bargaining on equal standing.

The applicability of the bureaucratic politics paradigm to the Soviet political system has been widely debated.¹²⁰ Jiri Valenta, one of the most prolific writers on the subject,¹²¹ describes his bureaucratic politics approach for the Soviet Union as follows: "Soviet foreign policy actions, like those of other states, do not result from a single actor (the government) rationally maximizing national security or any other value. Instead, these actions result from a process of political interaction ("pulling and hauling") among *several actors*—in this case, the senior decisionmakers and the heads of several bureaucratic organizations, the members of the Politburo, and the bureaucratic elites at the Central Committee level."¹²²

Valenta painted the post-Stalin Soviet decision process as one of "collective leadership" in an "oligarchic" Politburo where "no single leader possesses sufficient power or wisdom to decide (or willingness to accept responsibility for) all important policy issues."¹²³ I disagree. While the post-Stalin diffusion of political power across an "oligarchic" Politburo may enhance the overall role of political bargaining, it does not

¹¹⁹ Holland (221) contends that, "Even if the president gets his way in the end, every decision to some extent reflects the interaction among various actors."

¹²⁰ The most interesting scholarly volleying on this topic can be found in the Winter 1980 edition of *Studies in Comparative Communism* where Karen Dawisha's critique, "The Limits of the Bureaucratic Politics Model: Observations on the Soviet Case," (300-346) is directly countered by Graham Allison (327-328), Fred H. Eidlin (329-331), and Jiri Valenta (332-342).

¹²¹ See Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision, Revised Edition*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Jiri Valenta, "Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and 'Normalization' in East-Central Europe," *Comparative Politics* 16 (January 1984): 127-151; Jiri Valenta and William C. Potter, eds. *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

¹²² Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 4, 10.

entirely diminish the power and importance of the secretary general (or first secretary). The secretary general may appear to have less political autonomy than the President of the United States, but even Valenta—who held firm to the Allisonian view of bureaucratic politics—described the secretary as the “first among equals” in the bargaining process.¹²⁴ Ultimately, the decision to intervene still resides on the secretary’s shoulders, not any of the so-called “equals.”¹²⁵ The secretary general may have to be more cognizant of political coalitions, but that is a domestic political factor that differs only in degree, not in substance from that of the U.S. president. So, I contend that the basic tenets of bureaucratic politics and the centrality of the president as presented here hold for the Soviet system and the secretary general.

Interestingly, probably the greatest methodological error/omission in the second edition of *Essence of Decision* directly relates to the issue of Soviet bureaucratic politics and the role of Nikita Khrushchev. In the original edition’s application of Model III to the question of why the Soviets deployed the missiles to Cuba, Allison “speculated” that bureaucratic politics accounted for the missile deployment. He surmised: “it seems likely that the decision emerged not from grand global planning—the Soviet government (or Khrushchev) standing back and considering, for example, where to probe the United States—but rather from a process in which a number of different problems snowballed

¹²⁴ Jiri Valenta, “Soviet Decisionmaking on Czechoslovakia, 1968,” in *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security*, eds. Jiri Valenta and William C. Potter (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 170.

¹²⁵ See Kieran Williams, “New Sources on Soviet Decision Making During the 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 3 (1996): 458-60 for a critique of Valenta’s view of Soviet “collective leadership.”

into a single solution.”¹²⁶ His speculation was understandable given the dearth of information available at the time. But now that information is more widely accessible, it is odd that Allison and Zelikow totally omitted this section from their Model III analysis—violating their basic research design. Houghton argues that the likely reason for this omission is that the facts don’t support the proposition.¹²⁷ While “Khrushchev’s desire to place missiles in Cuba ran into some early opposition among his advisors,”¹²⁸ Houghton concluded, “the decision to deploy the missiles in Cuba was essentially Khrushchev’s.”¹²⁹ Political bargaining may accurately describe the advisory dynamics, but as with the president, the first secretary decides.

Bureaucratic bargaining and policy choice are driven by diverse perceptions of national, organizational and personal/domestic political interests.¹³⁰ But, this level of analysis uniquely magnifies the role of domestic politics. Given the centrality of the president/secretary general, domestic political concerns weigh heavily on the decision to use force. Often advisory persuasion and presidential choice have as much to do with domestic political pressure as with national and organizational interests. “Leaders’ perceptions of the political consequences of their actions play a decisive role in how they choose to deal with foreign policy crises.”¹³¹ In fact, Jentleson, Levite and Berman in

¹²⁶ Allison, *Essence*, 237.

¹²⁷ Houghton, 161-63.

¹²⁸ Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” 151; see also Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy J. Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (London: John Murray, 1997), 179-83 for more detailed discussion.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³⁰ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 298.

¹³¹ Alex Mintz and Nehemia Geva, “The Poliheuristic Theory of Foreign Policy Decisionmaking,” in *Decisionmaking on War and Peace: The Cognitive-Rational Debate*, eds. Geva and Mintz (London: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 83.

their study of military intervention were “struck by how domestic political pressures, or at least the perception thereof by leaders, initially pushed toward military intervention.”¹³²

The key variable here is the president/general secretary’s perception of the direction of domestic political pressure. Is there greater political risk in taking military action or in failing to take action? The perception that one’s job may be at risk “can be a powerful incentive to risk intervention.”¹³³ Vertzberger contends that this “reputational” threat can lead to a muddying of national and personal interests. He asserts that the perceived threat to a leader’s political position is often “translated into the perception of a threat to national interests,” which leads to a conviction that military intervention is the answer.¹³⁴ So, in a way, Mintz and Geva had it right: “Domestic politics is the *essence of decision* (emphasis added).”¹³⁵

The Cuban Missile Crisis certainly provided strong evidence to support this contention. Kennedy’s prior public statements that he would not allow offensive weapons in Cuba inherently put his reputation on the line upon discovery of Khrushchev’s move. “He can’t do that to me!” was Kennedy’s response—a response that accentuated the personal, not national, nature of the offense.¹³⁶ Even McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, recognized the underlying interests: “I don’t believe it’s primarily a

¹³² Bruce W. Jentleson, Ariel E. Levite and Larry Berman. “Foreign Military Intervention in Perspective” in Levite, Jentleson, and Berman, eds. *Foreign Military Intervention: The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 313.

¹³³ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 166.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹³⁵ Mintz and Geva, 83.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 339.

military problem. It's primarily a domestic political problem.”¹³⁷ Reputational interests demanded Kennedy intervene.

Finally, senior leaders are not only influenced by the perceptions of future political consequences, but also by the cognitive constraints of past intervention and non-intervention experiences. The two are not mutually exclusive. Past lessons help link perceived interests to policy preferences by providing mental causal models.¹³⁸

Policymakers faced with the uncertainty and limited information common to complex intervention scenarios resort to cognitive shortcuts to mentally simplify the problem at hand.¹³⁹ The most prominent shortcut mechanism used in the decision-making process is reasoning by historical analogy. “No intervention is discrete and separate,” argued Robert Jervis, “what happens at one time is strongly influenced by what has come before and strongly influences what comes later.”¹⁴⁰

Yuen Foong Khong, in *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, outlined several ways in which historical analogies help policymakers deal with the “bounded rationality” of the decision context. He noted that analogical shortcuts help define the situation, assess the stakes involved, provide prescriptive models for action, and evaluate policy alternatives.¹⁴¹ Vertzberger confirmed

¹³⁷ Ibid., 341.

¹³⁸ Christopher Hemmer, *Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy in the Middle East, 1979-1987*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 11; see also Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 217.

¹³⁹ See George, Alexander L. *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).

¹⁴⁰ Robert Jervis. Introduction to *The New American Interventionism: Essay from Political Science Quarterly*, ed. Demetrios James Caraley (New York: Columbia University Press: 1999), 6.

¹⁴¹ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 10.

this proposition in his research, finding that in “practically all the [intervention] cases” studied, “decisionmakers acted as cognitive misers,” relying heavily on shortcuts such as “historical analogies” to “reduce complexity and increase clarity and certainty.”¹⁴² These cognitive shortcuts, therefore, inform policymakers about which policy options best support perceived interests. Reasoning by historical analogy provides a critical explanatory link between known interests and policy preferences; past lessons provide causal models for action that link the two.¹⁴³ The dominant analogies used inherently constrain the rationality of the decision context and provide critical insight into the ultimate intervention decision.¹⁴⁴

Interestingly, reasoning by historical analogy directly affects both research questions posed in this study. Some historical analogies specifically inform policymakers on the issue of *whether* to use force—which helps explain the decision to intervene. Other analogies provide models for action in terms of *how* to use force—which helps explain the method of force chosen.¹⁴⁵ Some analogies do both. The lesson of Munich—never appease an aggressor—informed leaders like Truman in the case of Korea and Bush in the case of Iraq to intervene quickly to stop the spread of aggression.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴² Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 390.

¹⁴³ Hemmer, 10-12.

¹⁴⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 220; see also Snyder and Diesing, 371. Snyder and Diesing go so far as to contend that the use of historical analogy to develop a specific strategy is “irrational” insofar as it obscures the distinct features of the present problem.

¹⁴⁵ See Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking in Time: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 4; and Khong, 11.

¹⁴⁶ See Record for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Munich analogy on U.S. intervention decisions.

Munich analogy encourages early action, but “teaches nothing about how force should be used.”¹⁴⁷

Lessons from two other notable U.S. experiences—Vietnam and, more recently, Somalia—caution against the use of force. The “Vietnam syndrome” has proven a powerful and lasting “influence on American statecraft.”¹⁴⁸ Nixon complained that intervention critics “brandished ‘another Vietnam’ like a scepter, an all-purpose argument-stopper for any situation where it was being asserted that the United States should do something rather than nothing.”¹⁴⁹ The more contemporary intervention failure, Somalia, directly influenced the Clinton administration decision not to intervene in the Rwandan genocide.¹⁵⁰ President Clinton could not stand the political heat of seeing another U.S. soldier dragged through the streets of Africa. The traumatic lessons of Vietnam and Somalia found their way into formalized prescriptions on the use of force—the Weinberger Doctrine and Presidential Decision Document 25, respectively.

Responding in 1984 to the recent Beirut disaster and continued effects of the “Vietnam syndrome,” Caspar Weinberger, then Secretary of Defense, outlined six policy conditions for the proper use of force. In essence: (1) vital interests must be at stake; (2) there must be a clear commitment to victory; (3) political and military objectives must be clear; (4) overwhelming force must be applied to secure objectives; (5) the intervention

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 72. See also Barry, M. Blechman, and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978), for an analysis of the impact of the Vietnam experience on the decision to use force for political objectives.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Record, 72.

¹⁵⁰ See Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide—Why the United States Let the Rwandan Tragedy Happen,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 288:2 (September 2001): 84-108.

must have strong public support; and (6) force must be used only as a last resort.¹⁵¹

These formalized lessons of past experiences directly guided the generally successful application of force in Operation Desert Storm. Right on the heels of the Gulf War victory, though, came the Mogadishu disaster. Consequently, "the Clinton administration incorporated Weinberger-type conditions into Presidential Decision Directive 25," the doctrine guiding the use of American military force in humanitarian and peace operations.¹⁵² As Campbell noted, "PDD 25 is the direct descendent of the military's lessons of Vietnam."¹⁵³ Unlike Munich, the Vietnam and Somali lessons ultimately affected not only the decision to use force, but also the policy preferences on how to use force.

Most historical lessons are not formalized into prescriptions for the use of force, but provide much more subtle cognitive maps for policymakers. For example, the successful covert U.S. interventions in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954) clearly provided models for action in Cuba in 1961.¹⁵⁴ Those successes not only encouraged intervention at the Bay of Pigs, but also reinforced a policy preference for the manner of intervention—CIA-led covert operations. Soviet policymakers have also demonstrated sensitivity to historical analogies. Adelman, in his study of Soviet interventions, concluded: "Most important of all in invasion decisions have been the memories of the consequences of Soviet weakness and German control of Eastern Europe in World War

¹⁵¹ Kenneth J. Campbell, "Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine," *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 364-65.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Adelman, 288.

II.”¹⁵⁵ Adelman found reasoning by historical analogy to be a dominant influence on intervention decisions for both the United States and Soviet Union across the entire Cold War period.¹⁵⁶

The historical analogies discussed so far highlight the distinctly different impact that past successes and failures have on the intervention decision calculus. Previous intervention successes provide models for action (*how*) and increase confidence in the decision to intervene (*whether*). Success, though, tends to breed complacency and hubris, which have the effect of constraining the search for policy options. “Decision-makers...are likely to repeat those strategies which proved effective without seriously considering the changing domestic or external milieu.”¹⁵⁷ For example, the successful application of limited military means and gradualism to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis without escalation to a nuclear World War III provided a powerful historical analogy for the Johnson administration in their consideration to militarily intervene in Vietnam.¹⁵⁸ Similar graduated military methods were ultimately pursued in Vietnam without full consideration of the radically different “external milieu.” As the old saying goes, “Nothing fails like success.”¹⁵⁹ Synder and Diesing concluded from their sixteen case studies of decision-making in international crises that this analogical miscalculation results from “the tendency to treat a successful strategy as somehow having an inherent

¹⁵⁵ Adelman, 288.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 287-88.

¹⁵⁷ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, “The Middle East Crisis: Theoretical Propositions and Examples,” in *Managing International Crises*, ed. Daniel Frei (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), 93.

¹⁵⁸ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 307.

¹⁵⁹ See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 278.

virtue, rather than as owing its success to a particular combination of circumstances not likely to be repeated.”¹⁶⁰

Conversely, policy failures—especially dramatic ones—constrain intervention behavior by increasing perceived risk (*whether*) especially where the current context is perceived to be similar to that of the past failure.¹⁶¹ If intervention is pursued, though, past failures may actually lead to an expanded option search because of the desire to avoid repeating a failed strategy (*how*). “All other factors being equal, success leads actors to repeat previous actions, whereas failure encourages them to rethink their strategy.”¹⁶² Although, Rosenau cautions that failures have a much greater impact in terms of constraining intervention than successes do in stimulating it.¹⁶³ A good example of failure leading to more cautious risk assessment and broader policy formulation is the Cuban Missile Crisis ExCom deliberations following the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Kennedy and his advisers more cautiously and comprehensively developed and evaluated potential policy options than what was done previously in the Bay of Pigs.¹⁶⁴ As Jervis noted: “Although states do not blindly repeat policies that were followed by success and shun

¹⁶⁰ Snyder and Diesing, 371; see also Ernest R. May, *“Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), on the misuse of historical analogies; and Ernest R. May and Richard E. Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

¹⁶¹ See Vertzberber, *Risk Taking*, 48 for a specific discussion of impact success and failure has on risk assessments.

¹⁶² Richard W. Mansbach and John A. Vasquez, *In Search of Theory: A new Paradigm for Global Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 254.

¹⁶³ Rosenau, “Adaptive Behavior,” 136.

¹⁶⁴ See Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 329-340.

those that seemed to produce failure, each important event does influence future behavior.”¹⁶⁵

Much research has focused on the factors that determine which historical analogies are available to decision-makers and how likely they are to be used. In simple terms, experiences that are recent, vivid, similar in basic characteristics to the current crisis, experienced first-hand by policymakers, and/or of great historical importance are more likely to be recalled and evoked as guiding analogies.¹⁶⁶ These factors help identify the repertoire of potential analogies available to policymakers, but for the purposes of this research, what is important is not what historical analogies are available as much as which are actually evoked in the processes of bargaining, persuading and choosing. Those are the ones that will provide critical insight into cognitive constraints, risk perceptions and policy preferences.

In summary, the decision to intervene in an international crisis is the result of a complex process that evolves over time and is impacted at multiple levels of analysis. During the Cold War realpolitik dominated interventionary impulses for both superpowers. Realist-based rational calculations of strategic interests, threats and opportunities, and power balances reasonably explain a superpower's interest in a given international crisis and the decision to intervene. But, the timing and manner of intervention is ultimately determined by more proximate organizational and individual

¹⁶⁵ Robert Jervis, Introduction to *The New American Interventionism: Essays from Political Science Quarterly*, ed. Demetrios James Caraley (New York: Columbia University Press: 1999), 7.

¹⁶⁶ See Bennett, Andrew, Joseph Leggold and Danny Unger, eds., *Friends in Need: Burden Sharing in the Persian Gulf War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 15; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*; Khong; Hemmer; Yacoov Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

factors. Organizational processes and behavior constrain the decision context. SOPs, information control, and organizational capabilities significantly impact policy formulation and option assessment stages. In the end, though, the decision to intervene is the purview of individuals—with the president and secretary general playing the central role—influenced by multiple interests, perceptions, and political pressures. Reasoning by analogy pervades the process; it simplifies the complexity of the decision-making task by providing policymakers a causal model to mentally link interests with policy preferences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Allison applied his three conceptual lenses to the single case of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The book focused “principally on explanation”¹ using what Robert Yin called the “critical case” version of a single-case research design.² The result, though, was three relatively independent historical case descriptions that revealed interesting aspects of the missile crisis, but represented only loose linkage to the theoretical constructs built in Allison’s three conceptual chapters. Consequently, *Essence of Decision* received some criticism for lack of methodological rigor.³ Allison’s two-fold purpose—to “examine the central puzzles of the Cuban missile crisis” and “explore the influence of unrecognized assumptions upon our thinking about events like the missile crisis”⁴—led to inherent methodological trade-offs. As Bendor and Hammond noted, “there is an inevitable tension between attempting to explain a particular event (a task characteristic of historians) and attempting to construct models (a job more characteristic of social scientists)...[T]he price paid by *Essence of Decision* on the theoretical dimension was

¹ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., 9.

² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 5, 38; see also Harry Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

³ See Bernstein, “Understanding Decisionmaking,” for critique of both 1971 and 1999 editions.

⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2nd ed., ix-x.

that due to its attention to historical detail, it paid insufficient attention to the internal logic of the models.”¹

The methodology of this paper tips the balance towards the social scientist side. The conceptual models have been more narrowly defined and will be directly applied to a comparative case study using a more rigorous approach. The intent is to balance explanatory richness with systematic theory building.² As opposed to Allison and Zelikow, my purpose is not to generate significant new information in an effort to enhance historical description, but to evaluate existing case literature through the enhanced Allisonian construct to determine if that framework helps us systematically explain military intervention decision-making.

Case Study

There are three basic theory-testing methods: “experimentation, observation using large-*n* analysis, and observation using case-study analysis.”³ Which is most appropriate for the task at hand? The answer is largely dependent upon the nature of the research question and the ability to control the behavioral events.⁴ Experimentation, while desirable for its ability to control the test environment, is obviously not feasible in the study of military intervention.⁵

¹ Bendor and Hammond, 318.

² See Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1997) for a discussion on theory building and theory testing.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴ See Yin, 1. He also identifies the focus on contemporary or historical phenomena as a decision condition, but I see little benefit in this distinction regarding military intervention decision-making.

⁵ See Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Dallas: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), for discussion of experimental method; see David Collier, “The Comparative Method,” in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter,

The choice between the large-*n* and case study approaches then comes down to which provides the “strongest” test for the purpose of this research.⁶ Van Evera argues that, “Large-*n* can be best if we want to test a prime hypothesis, and if we have many well-recorded cases to study. Case studies can be best if we want to infer or test explanatory hypotheses, or if cases have been unevenly recorded...”⁷ In simpler terms, he concludes that “large-*n* methods tell us more about whether hypotheses hold than why they hold. Case studies say more about why they hold.”⁸ Case studies can more effectively analyze causation by identifying the conditions under which causal patterns occur, hence the attractiveness for explanatory research such as this.⁹ In fact, Vertzberger in his work, *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention Decisions*, clearly dismissed large-*n* studies as inappropriate for the types of questions posed here: “The quantitative studies do not address the questions why and how intervention decisions are made.”¹⁰ Yin, in line with Vertzberger, recommended the case study approach for research that poses “how” or “why” questions—“questions that deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence.”¹¹ As such, case studies are the dominant method for the study of decision-

(Washington D.C.: American Political Science Association, 1993), 106; and Van Evera, 30, for discussion of the limits of experimental methods in the field of political science.

⁶ See Van Evera's discussion of strong tests, 30-34.

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ See Randy Stoecker, “Evaluating and Rethinking the Case Study,” *The Sociological Review* 39, no. 1 (February 1991): 93-95; and Alexander L. George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New York: Free Press, 1979) 60.

¹⁰ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 3.

¹¹ Yin, 6.

making.¹² Hence, the nature of research questions and theoretical propositions posed in this study inherently leads to a case study approach. Only through rich case analysis can one assess the casual linkages between past intervention experiences, rational realpolitik calculations, organizational processes, and individual behavior. The question next becomes how best to structure a case study for these purposes.

Case studies have often been viewed as the “weak sisters” of social science methodology. Common critiques have highlighted the inherent challenges of dealing with the problem of small-*n* to include a lack of generalizability and ineffectual control of multiple variables. Some scholars such as King, Keohane, and Verba in their work, *Designing Social Inquiry*, have argued that the way to enhance the scientific rigor of qualitative research is to make it look more like quantitative research, especially in the areas of sampling and number of observations.¹³ McKeown counters King, Keohane and Verba’s approach by arguing that “there is little to be gained and much to be lost by insisting on attempting to interpret everything that a researcher does or thinks from a purely statistical standpoint...” He adds that the “disparities between case study research and classical statistical hypothesis testing are too great to treat the latter as an ideal typical reconstruction of the former.”¹⁴ Those disparities again boil down to differences in purpose. The case researcher is as much interested in explaining causal mechanisms as testing them. The process is more holistic. “Seen in this light, the test of a hypothesis—

¹² See Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*; and Yin, 12.

¹³ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Timothy McKeown, “Case Studies and the Statistical World View: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*.” *International Organization* 53, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 187.

the central theoretical activity from the standpoint of classical statistics—is but one phase in a long, involved process of making sense of a phenomena.”¹⁵ In that long process of theory development, small-*n* case analysis neither competes with nor substitutes for large-*n* quantitative studies; the two genuinely complement each other.¹⁶

Several approaches developed over the past couple of decades enhance the rigor of case study research without sacrificing its unique contributions to theory building. Van Evera identifies controlled comparison, congruence testing, and process tracing as three primary techniques for improving case study research.¹⁷ This research will use a combination of controlled comparison—otherwise known as the comparative method—and process tracing to test the modified Allisonian construct for military intervention decision-making.

Comparative method has garnered much scholarly attention because of its ability to compensate for many of the shortcomings of the single case approach. While individual case studies “provide few lessons that can be easily generalized,” the “logic of the comparative method, when merged with case analysis, can provide a powerful tool for theory building.”¹⁸ That logic demands systematic selection and comparison of two or more cases. Donald Campbell, who out-right dismissed case study research in his 1963 classic with Julian Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*, has since noted that the problems associated with small-*n* studies can be

¹⁵ McKeown, 188.

¹⁶ See George, “*Structured, Focused Comparison*,” 61.

¹⁷ Van Evera, 56.

¹⁸ Patrick J. Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 24-5.

minimized if “cases are selected for strong logical and theoretical reasons, and if the research design includes some aspect of variable control through strategic case selection and comparison.”¹⁹ Under these circumstances, comparative case studies approach Campbell and Stanley’s “quasi-experimental” methods. Campbell has recently gone so far as to lend his support to the case study method by writing the “Forward” to Robert K. Yin’s updated classic, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.²⁰

Selecting cases that are matched on variables not central to the study and differ on key variables that are the focus of analysis advances comparative methodology.²¹ Approaches for case selection frequently follow variations of John Stuart Mill’s “method of difference” or “method of agreement,” or similarly, Przeworski and Teune’s “most similar” or “most different” designs.²² Mill’s designations of “difference” and “agreement” refer relative values of the dependent variable. For instance, a researcher using the method of difference would choose cases that had different values on the dependent variable, but shared similar general characteristics.²³ Przeworski and Teune, on the other hand, use the labels “similar” and “different” to refer to background variables. A most similar research design, for example, may include categories of like countries such as Scandinavian or communist. “The most similar systems design is based on the belief that a number of theoretically significant differences will be found among

¹⁹ Ibid., 24; Donald T. Campbell, “‘Degrees of Freedom’ and the Case Study,” *Comparative Political Studies* 8 (1975): 178-93.

²⁰ Yin, ix-xi.

²¹ Collier, 106.

²² See Collier, 111-12; Haney, 27; Van Evera, 57; and Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (Malabar: Krieger, 1970).

²³ See Collier, Note 10, 116-17; and Van Evera, 57.

similar systems and that these differences can be used in explanation. The alternative design, which seeks maximal heterogeneity in the sample of systems, is based on a belief that in spite of intersystemic differentiation, the populations will differ with regard to only a limited number of variables or relationships.”²⁴

In addition to selecting cases based on logic, theoretical importance and variable control, a researcher can also enhance the rigor of small-*n* case studies by performing multiple within-case comparisons. These multiple comparisons in essence increase the number of observations.²⁵ Process tracing is one method of within-case comparison.²⁶ “In process tracing, the investigator explores the chain of events of the *decision-making process* (emphasis added) by which initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes. The cause-effect link that connects independent variable and outcome is unwrapped and divided into smaller steps; then the investigator looks for observable evidence of each step.”²⁷ Process tracing directly supports the research task at hand. The ability to unfold events over time and note the relationship between causal variables is critical to assessing the interplay of past experiences, realist-based rational calculations, organizational processes, and bureaucratic politics in the overall decision process to militarily intervene in an international crisis. Van Evera contends that a thorough process-trace can provide a strong test of theory by uniquely highlighting “smoking gun” evidence.

²⁴ Przeworski and Teune, 39.

²⁵ King, Keohane and Verba, 227.

²⁶ See Collier, 115-16; and Haney, 28.

²⁷ Van Evera, 64.

Case Selection

Given the lack of definitive guidance on case study selection, it is important to review some scholarly advice on the subject. Contrary to King, Keohane, and Verba, several case study practitioners have emphasized the importance of dissociating qualitative case selection from the quantitative sampling paradigm. Robert Yin cautions: "A fatal flaw in doing case studies is to conceive of statistical generalization as the method for generalizing the results... This is because cases are not 'sampling units' and should not be selected for this reason."²⁸ He advises case researchers to "aim toward *analytic* generalization" (emphasis added) and "avoid thinking in such confusing terms as 'the sample of cases' or the 'small sample size of cases.'"²⁹

Alexander George, the father of the structured, focused comparison case method, further clarifies Yin's point: "The small-*n* in a controlled comparison (which may be limited to as few as two cases) is not necessarily representative of the universe of instances belonging to that class of events; what is more, *it need not be* representative in the statistical sampling sense in order to contribute to theory development." What "guides selection of cases in the controlled comparison approach is not numbers but *variety*, that is, cases belonging to the same class that differ from each other."³⁰

Timothy McKeown provides additional insight in how to approach case selection for explanatory research such as this: "Cases are often more important for their value in clarifying previously obscure theoretical relationships than for providing an additional

²⁸ Yin, 31

²⁹ Ibid., 32.

³⁰ George, "Structured, Focused Comparison," 60.

observation to a sample...a good case is not necessarily a 'typical' case, but rather a 'telling' case..."³¹

In summary, selected cases should be "telling" cases that provide variety within the same class, highlight key theoretical relationships, and form a basis for "analytic" generalization. If the theoretically "telling" cases also happen to be intrinsically important from a historical standpoint, then findings become even more valuable. Finally, the information demands of process tracing necessitate the selection of "data rich" cases.³² The cases chosen for comparative analysis in this research reflect all of these considerations.

I have chosen two of the most studied and controversial superpower interventions of the Cold War period. In 1961 the United States responded to the communist threat posed by Castro's regime by launching a CIA-initiated invasion at the Bay of Pigs, Cuba. It failed miserably—politically and militarily. Seven years later the Soviet Union responded to the liberal, democratic threats posed by Dubcek's regime with a full-scale overt military invasion of Czechoslovakia. It produced a swift military victory. These two cases were chosen for several "logical" and "theoretical" reasons, including a combination of "most similar" and "most different" factors and the overall significance of the events. The two interventions, which appear on the surface to have little in common, share structural similarities. Most obvious, the two states involved were the two superpowers that defined the bipolar divide of the Cold War. Second, the two

³¹ McKeown, 174.

³² Data richness and intrinsic importance are two of the case selection criteria presented by Van Evera, 77-88.

interventions took place in the decade of the 1960s, straddling the riskiest superpower confrontation of the Cold War and the specific target of Allison's research—the Cuban Missile Crisis. Pearson, Baumann and Pickering found that the 1960s had the greatest frequency of superpower military interventions of any Cold War decade.³³ In this era of “brinkmanship,”³⁴ realpolitik dominated national security decision-making processes in each state. Third, both interventions involved superpowers responding to regime changes in small powers within their sphere of influence that threatened their regional and ideological hegemony.³⁵ Finally, Cuba and Czechoslovakia were not the first perceived threats to regional hegemony in either sphere. Each was preceded by earlier small power regime changes in Latin America and the Soviet bloc that led to superpower interventions in the 1950s. Those prior interventions provided models for action.

But, in spite of the similarities, each superpower responded differently. The United States chose covert, indirect military action through CIA-trained Cuban exiles while the Soviets launched a large and direct multinational military operation. These two cases of military intervention, therefore, demonstrate variance on the dependent variable in terms of method of intervention. While each superpower ultimately chose to militarily intervene, they did so in substantially different forms; and as discussed earlier, the decision to intervene and the method chosen are inherently intertwined.

³³ Pearson, Baumann and Pickering, 217 and 219.

³⁴ Martin McCauley, *Russia, America & the Cold War: 1949-1991* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998).

³⁵ The crisis data tabulated in Brecher and Wilkenfeld highlights the numerous structural similarities between the two cases.

These two interventions hence raise an interesting question: Why when faced with reasonably similar threats to their regional hegemony, did the two superpowers respond with radically different intervention decisions? The difference in political systems does not account for the variance because each state has demonstrated the opposite behavior in other crisis situations. The most notable example during the same relative time frame was the direct, overt U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 in response to very similar regional hegemonic concerns.

These two cases are both data rich and intrinsically important. The reason that much has been written on these two cases is precisely because of their historical importance. The Bay of Pigs fiasco tarnished the reputation of the Kennedy administration and largely set the stage for the high stakes superpower confrontation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia caught the West off-guard and has been deemed by some intervention scholars as the "most important deployment of [Soviet] military might" since World War II.³⁶ Analyzing these two significant events, one by the Soviets and one by the United States, directly addresses a concern shared by some intervention scholars. Levite, Jentleson, and Berman note the "lack of comparative thinking...surrounding foreign military intervention."³⁷ Karen Feste more explicitly contends: "Comparisons of superpower interventionary behavior are almost nonexistent."³⁸

³⁶ Alex P. Schmid, *Soviet Military Interventions Since 1945* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 1.

³⁷ Jentleson, Levite and Berman, ix.

³⁸ Feste, 36.

Following the advice that “[f]urther analysis of realism, internal processes, and crisis activity should include at least...cross-national research,” these two comparative cases were selected for specific theoretical reasons.³⁹ A key goal was to control for—as best as possible—the realist-based rational actor independent variable to highlight the impact of the more scholarly controversial variables of organizational processes, bureaucratic politics, and reasoning by analogy. Since third image, realist-based theories dominate the study of international relations, only through control of structural factors can first and second image findings gain credibility.⁴⁰ The cases represent systemic similarity in terms of superpower status, perceived threats to regional hegemony, and general structural characteristics of the same Cold War period.

Karen Feste found that the U.S. and Soviet superpowers have given “similar focused attention” to threat developments within their spheres of interest—Latin America and Eastern Europe respectively. She notes that sphere of influence countries “have been targeted for more intervention in all forms.”⁴¹ Those sphere of influence interventions caused the greatest international consternation during the era of superpower “brinkmanship.” Martin McCauley applies this description to the Cold War years of 1953-1969, highlighting the dangerous conflicts and volatile relations between the East and West of that time frame.⁴² Bounded by the end of the Korean War and death of Stalin on one end and the start of détente on the other, this Cold War period of high

³⁹ James and Hristoulas, 77.

⁴⁰ See Andrew Parasiliti’s concern with controlling for “change in the structure of the international system” before imputing first image causation in “The First Image Revisited,” *International Security* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 167.

⁴¹ Feste, 70-71.

⁴² McCauley, 4.

stakes confrontation not only encompasses the two primary interventions under study, but also the preceding crises that provided cognitive models for action—Guatemala in 1954 for the U.S., and Poland and Hungary in 1956 for the Soviets. In addition, this period also captures the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965—a decision that was influenced by the outcome of the Bay of Pigs.

The case selection represents Mill's method of difference in terms of variation on the dependent variable—method of intervention—and in a way, reflects aspects of both Przeworski and Teune's most similar and most different designs. The cases are of similar class—superpowers, but clearly represent variety in terms of political ideology/structures. As such, causal mechanisms that demonstrate positive comparative findings should enhance the generalizability of the modified Allisonian construct because of the "heterogeneity" of U.S. and Soviet political systems and corresponding decision structures.

Research Design

The analysis of the selected cases will follow the basic framework of Alexander George's method of structured, focused comparison.⁴³ His methodology nicely encapsulates comparative analysis and process tracing in a systematic design process. It has been recommended and used by other military intervention scholars.⁴⁴ George's

⁴³ George, "Structured, Focused Comparison."

⁴⁴ For a recommendation of the structured, focused comparison method see Stephen M. Meyer, "Soviet National Security Decisionmaking: What Do We Know and What Do We Understand?" in *Soviet Decisionmaking and National Security*, ed. Jiri Valenta and William Potter (London: George, Allen, and Unwin, 1984), 287; for research applications of the method, see Levite, Jentleson and Berman, *Foreign*

approach compares two or more cases in a “focused” manner by dealing selectively with only the theoretically relevant aspects of the cases, and in a “structured” way by applying common, general questions to each case. This case study research will be focused around the three levels of analysis of the modified Allisonian construct—rational actor, organizational processes, and bureaucratic politics. Within each “focused” area, the relevant interests, processes, and constraints will be evaluated. Process tracing will highlight the relationships within and between key causal mechanisms and their impact on the decision to militarily intervene. This approach directly structures the case study analysis around the three-by-three conceptual matrix presented in the previous chapter.

For the rational actor level of analysis, the critical questions are as follows: What are the perceived threats and corresponding national interests at stake? What is the nature of the international structure and relative power balances that may constrain military intervention? In what manner does the intervention decision process reflect utility maximizing rational calculation of costs and benefits?

For simplification and commonality, two specific organizations—military and intelligence (CIA for U.S. and KGB for Soviet Union)—will be addressed in each case. The CIA, KGB and both militaries were the critical organizational actors in the Bay of Pigs and Czechoslovak intervention decision processes. For the organizational level of analysis, the following questions are posed: What are the organizational interests at stake? What is the role of each organization in the search for policy options? Do

organizational capabilities, standard operating procedures, and/or organizational control of information constrain the decision context? Are past interventions referenced as either models for action (past successes) or reasons to explore other options (past failures)?

The following questions structure the analysis of bureaucratic politics: Who are the central players in the decision process? What positions do they advocate and why? Does reasoning by analogy constrain perceptions of key actors? What are the personal and domestic interests of Kennedy and Brezhnev? What role does bargaining/persuasion play in influencing the ultimate choice of intervention?

Process tracing throughout the analysis should not only identify the various causal effects of each factor on the decision to intervene, but also the relationships between causal mechanisms. Although this is predominantly a comparative analysis of the two central cases, assessing the impact of previous experiences necessitates an examination of key prior crises decisions—Guatemala, 1954 in the U.S. case, and Poland and Hungary, 1956 in the Soviet case. This inherently expands the observations of the subject research phenomena.

CHAPTER 4

BAY OF PIGS

On March 17, 1960 President Eisenhower authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to begin implementation of “A Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime.” The CIA strategy—based on their successes in Iran (1953) and particularly Guatemala (1954)—combined radio-based propaganda with guerilla and small paramilitary operations in an effort to spur a counterrevolutionary movement against Castro.¹ Richard Bissell, the CIA Deputy Director for Plans, was in charge of the operation, and training of Cuban exiles started immediately.

Over the next several months, Castro’s firm suppression of internal guerilla operations and interception of CIA air drops led Bissell to conclude that the original strategy was inadequate to counter Castro’s growing Soviet-supported power base. That fall—at the height of the presidential elections—Bissell decided that an expanded paramilitary option provided the only viable threat to Castro. On November 4, 1960 he directed the CIA operatives training exile forces in Guatemala to shift planning towards a full-scale amphibious assault on the island. In Bissell’s own words: “It was during the

¹ Richard M. Bissell, Jr., *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 153; Peter Kornbluh, ed., *Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the Invasion of Cuba* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 24, 269.

transition period between Kennedy's election in November and his inauguration in January that the concept of Brigade 2506 began to take its final form."¹

The new assault strategy centered on an amphibious landing of 600-750 well-equipped exiles (although Bissell had already planned for 1,500)² on the shores of Cuba accompanied by extensive air strikes launched from Nicaragua. The mission objective would be to seize and hold a limited beachhead area and eventually attract dissident elements from inside Cuba. With a piece of Cuba secured for a reasonable period of time, the United States would recognize a provisional Cuban government and send in a pacification force.³ This plan recognized that in the absence of any large internal uprising the U.S. would have to intervene in short order to reinforce the brigade.

CIA Director, Allen Dulles and Bissell briefed President-elect Kennedy on the Cuban operation on November 27. Eisenhower gave a "general go-ahead signal on 29 November and...reaffirmed it on 3 January 1961."⁴ At a final transition meeting the day before the inauguration, Eisenhower told Kennedy that he had supported the Cuban exiles "to the utmost" and that it was now Kennedy's "responsibility" to do "whatever is necessary" to make it succeed.⁵ Eisenhower emphasized that "the United States cannot allow the Castro Government to continue to exist," and that the invasion effort should be

¹ Ibid., 156.

² See CIA, *Classified Message*, October 31, 1960 referenced in Kornbluh, 277; Bissell, 156.

³ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126.

⁴ CIA *Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation*, found in Kornbluh, 35.

⁵ Memorandum by Clark Clifford, January 24, Editorial Note 22 in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1961-1963, Vol. X, Cuba, 1961-1962 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1997); Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), note on 89-90; Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960-1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 104.

“continued and accelerated.”⁶ Kennedy had now become the not-so-proud father of an adopted “Baby Huey”—a child that had to be cared for, but so large and clumsy that it threatened its own parent.

On January 28 at his first formal briefing on the operation, Kennedy approved the continuation of mission preparations, but reserved authorization of the final military action for a later time.⁷ As the brigade recruitment and training steadily expanded towards Bissell’s ultimate goal—a force strength of 1,500—Kennedy and his State Department advisers grew more and more concerned about the magnitude of the operation. A large-scale amphibious invasion accompanied by massive air strikes would certainly be pinned on the United States. Kennedy wanted the operation to look more “Cuban” and less “American” and persistently pushed for other alternatives to be investigated.

On March 11, 1961 the CIA presented Kennedy with four options: a nighttime amphibious infiltration of small-scale paramilitary forces; a full-scale daytime landing with comprehensive tactical air support; a daytime landing preceded by a separate diversionary effort; and a remote landing followed by a slow buildup.⁸ The CIA recommended the full-scale, daytime amphibious assault accompanied by tactical air support as the only viable alternative that provided enough “shock” to reasonably achieve the desired objective of regime change. The plan called for air strikes targeting Castro’s air forces, communications facilities, naval patrol vessels, and tanks and artillery to

⁶ *Memorandum* from McNamara to Kennedy, January 24, Editorial Note 22 in *FRUS*; Wyden, 88.

⁷ Kornbluh, 50.

⁸ See Kornbluh, 118-124 for CIA briefing paper “Proposed Action Against Cuba,” 11 March 1961; and Bissell, 169.

commence the day prior to the landing. The goal was to ensure uncontested beachhead operations on D-Day. The amphibious assault on the morning of D-Day would be accompanied by close air support and air interdiction to suppress remaining enemy resistance. The chosen landing site near the city of Trinidad was far removed from the bulk of Castro's forces and provided an escape valve for the exile forces. They could disperse into the nearby Escambray Mountains and link up with other opposition guerrilla forces in the event that they had to abandon the beachhead.⁹

Kennedy concluded that "the best possible plan" had "not yet been presented," and directed the CIA to quickly come up with a "less spectacular" alternative to Operation Trinidad.¹⁰ The President's desire to maintain "plausible deniability" drove several significant changes to the plan over a very short period of time. The landing site was shifted from Trinidad to a more remote area of the island—the Bay of Pigs—to reduce the detectable "noise" level. The dawn landing was changed to a nighttime operation in order to ensure that all U.S. naval support vessels would be over the horizon before sunrise. The United States had only once before performed a night amphibious assault. The D-1 air strikes designed to gain air superiority and shock Castro's forces immediately prior to the landing operation were shifted back to D-2 and supplemented by a fake defection to Florida to increase the appearance that the air operations were internally initiated. D-Day air strikes would initially hit surviving Castro air forces then

⁹ See the Joint Chiefs of Staff evaluation for a full description of the concept in *Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara*, February 3, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 35.

¹⁰ See *National Security Action Memorandum No. 31*, written by McGeorge Bundy, March 11, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 60; and Bissell, 169.

establish air support capability off of an airstrip near the beachhead so that all subsequent air operations originated on the island.

Kennedy approved the new plan—called Operation Zapata—on April 4 after receiving a positive vote count from his policy advisers.¹¹ Although McGeorge Bundy had earlier characterized the revised plan as “unspectacular and quiet, and plausibly Cuban,” Kennedy continued to have reservations about the scope and “noise” level of the air plan.¹² Those reservations manifested in the form of critical last minute changes at the final go-ahead. On April 14, 1961 Kennedy authorized the D-2 air strikes to commence the following day but told Bissell to reduce the planned sorties to the bare minimum.¹³ Bissell ordered half of the scheduled aircraft to stand down. The scaled-back air strikes caught Castro’s forces off guard, but only destroyed two-thirds of his military aircraft. The remaining aircraft were to be targeted on D-Day. The D-2 air strikes and staged defection fooled no one. The political outcries from Cuba, the Soviet Union and the United Nations all pointed to the U.S. as the source of intervention. On April 16, Kennedy decided to proceed with the amphibious assault, but—due to the growing international pressure—canceled the planned tactical air support. He directed that no air strikes take place in the heart of Cuba until operations could be launched from the beachhead airstrip.

The mission, which began under the early morning darkness of 17 April, stumbled from the start. Coral reefs—misidentified as seaweed by photo interpreters—lay in the

¹¹ Kornbluh, 298.

¹² *Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Kennedy*, March 15, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 64.

¹³ Bissell, 183; Kornbluh, 298-299.

path of the landing party.¹⁴ The threat to the landing craft halted the flotilla short of the shore forcing men to haul supplies through the coral shallows. The delay caused by this oversight meant that the intended nighttime landing was still ongoing at dawn and particularly susceptible to air attack. Castro's surviving military aircraft roamed relatively freely over the beachhead and sunk key supply ships. Instead of ten days' worth of supplies, the exiles made it to shore with only a full day's ammunition and limited communications capability. The exile brigade—over 1400 strong—immediately met stiff resistance from 20,000 enemy forces supported by tanks and artillery.¹⁵ With extremely limited ammunition and no air superiority, the brigade could not hold out long. In spite of inflicting over 3,600 casualties (approximately 1,600 deaths) on Castro's forces, the brigade was overrun and soundly defeated in less than seventy-two hours.¹⁶

The disastrous operation left 114 exiles (and four American pilots) dead and 1,189 captured.¹⁷ One hundred and fifty exiles were rescued, but the same could not be said for America's reputation. The U.S. role in the supposedly covert operation was widely exposed to the detriment and humiliation of the Kennedy administration. The failed invasion ultimately secured Cuba's destiny as a Soviet client state and emboldened Khrushchev in the high-stakes game of superpower politics—a game that would push the two sides to the brink of nuclear war over the same piece of property only eighteen months later. Recognizing the role that the Bay of Pigs played in consolidating Castro's

¹⁴ Victor Andres Triay, *Bay of Pigs: An Oral History of Brigade 2506* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-2.

¹⁷ Warren Trest and Donald Dodd, *Wings of Denial: The Alabama Air National Guard's Covert Role at the Bay of Pigs* (Montgomery: NewSouth, 2001), 13.

power, Che Guevera—in a secret meeting four months later—personally thanked White House aide Richard Goodwin for the invasion, bragging that it “had been a great political victory” for Cuba, transforming it “from an aggrieved little country into an equal.”¹⁸

Given the stakes at risk, why did the U.S. choose to militarily intervene in Cuba in such a fashion? What caused such an intelligent president and staff to proceed with such a risky adventure? Several postmortem examinations have centered their analysis on: (1) the failure to correctly prioritize national interests;¹⁹ (2) CIA and Joint Chief’s of Staff (JCS) ineptitude;²⁰ (3) small group dynamics, i.e. *groupthink*;²¹ (4) President Kennedy’s last minute changes to the invasion plan;²² and (5) the power of the Guatemalan (1954) analogy.²³ Each of these explanations has merit, but none alone provides a comprehensive, systematic explanation that tells the whole story or demonstrates the linkage between important variables. The answer to the puzzle lies within the complex decision construct that developed over time and was influenced by rational, realist-based concerns about communist expansion; organizational interests, routine and information control; political bargaining and presidential persuasion; personal/domestic political interests; and reasoning by historical analogy. Only by viewing this historical decision

¹⁸ Goodwin memo to the President, “Conversation with Commandante Ernesto Guevera of Cuba,” August 22, 1961, quoted in Kornbluh, 3.

¹⁹ Morgenthau.

²⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); and Wyden.

²¹ Irving J. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

²² Bissell; Grayston L. Lynch, *Decision for Disaster: Betrayal at the Bay of Pigs* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1998); Albert C. Persons, *Bay of Pigs: A Firsthand Account of the Mission by a U.S. Pilot in Support of the Cuban Invasion Force in 1961* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1990).

²³ Alex Roberto Hybel, *How Leaders Reason: US Intervention in the Caribbean Basin and Latin America* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990); and Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

through the multiple, integrated lenses of the modified Allisonian framework do these relationships become apparent.

Rational Actor: The Castro Problem

By the 1950s, a Cold War containment consensus had solidified in the United States and a corresponding national security state apparatus emerged that provided executive decision-makers both a mental framework for policy analysis and an institutional structure for policy formulation and implementation. National Security Council Document 68 (NSC-68) had formalized U.S. national security policy around the containment of Soviet communism and led to the recognition that vital American interests lay outside U.S. borders.²⁴ While those interests extended to communist threatened regimes around the globe, the most acute perceived threat was to regimes within the American sphere of influence. Communist movement in Latin American—especially Central American and Caribbean—“special interest” countries threatened U.S. regional hegemony, and that security threat was perceived in importance just below imminent peril to American territory.²⁵ While economic and ideological issues certainly played important roles, the greatest influence on U.S. Cold War intervention policy toward Latin America was clearly security concerns; and the fear of communism was the security concern *par excellence*.

The Eisenhower administration crystallized this sphere of influence perspective in U.S. national security policy. On September 25, 1956, President Eisenhower approved

²⁴ Graham Allison, “National Security Strategy for the 1990s,” in *America’s Global Interests: A New Agenda*, ed. Edward K. Hamilton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 202.

²⁵ Tillema, 25.

NSC. 5613/1 which included a statement that read: "If a Latin American State should establish with the Soviet bloc, close ties of such a nature as seriously to prejudice our vital national interests...[the United States must] be prepared to diminish Governmental economic and financial cooperation with that country and to take any other policy, economic or *military actions* deemed appropriate (emphasis added)."²⁶ Fidel Castro would soon put this policy to test in Cuba.

In the first week of January, 1959, Fidel Castro's revolution successfully forced Fulgencio Batista into exile, established a new regime in Havana and received official recognition from the United States.²⁷ CIA intelligence assessments at the time found that Castro did not have "any communist leanings," nor was he "working for the communists."²⁸ Those estimates proved short-lived. Castro's revolutionary government moved swiftly over the next several months to redesign Cuba's political, economic and military structures along communist lines to solidify Castro's hold on power.

By November, the CIA station chief in Havana had concluded that, "Fidel Castro, under the influence of his closest collaborators, particularly his brother Raul and Che Guevera, has been converted to communism." He further warned, "Cuba is preparing to export its revolution to other countries of the hemisphere and spread the war against capitalism."²⁹ During the same month, the Secretary of State advised President Eisenhower that in spite of U.S. diplomatic and economic measures, "there is no

²⁶ Quoted in Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 38.

²⁷ Kornbluh, 267.

²⁸ Higgins, 42.

²⁹ Fabian Escalante, *The Secret War: CIA Covert Operations Against Cuba 1959-62*, trans. Maxine Shaw, ed. Mirta Muniz (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1995), 40-41.

reasonable hope that Castro will voluntarily adopt policies and attitudes consistent with minimum Washington security requirements and policy interests.”³⁰ Castro’s steadily growing political and military strength cemented his resolve. In December, on the heels the State Department assessment, the CIA determined that “violent action” was the only means of breaking Castro’s grip on power. They recommended “the overthrow of Castro within one year” and went so far as to state that “thorough consideration be given to the elimination of Fidel Castro.”³¹

From a realist-based, rational perspective, Castro’s regime presented a clear threat to U.S. strategic and economic interests. Castro had demonstrated a willingness to not only implement communist reforms within Cuba, but to also sponsor communist incursions against other Latin American regimes in Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.³² His domestic policies of agrarian land reform and nationalization of private industries directly impacted U.S. economic interests. And finally, enhanced commercial trade with, and arms shipments from, the Soviet bloc solidified U.S. concerns of Soviet alliance and direct influence in the region. All of these security factors converged to convince Eisenhower that a Soviet surrogate ninety miles off the U.S. coast was unacceptable.

The military balance of power clearly favored the United States, at least for the time being. Cuba, itself, provided little direct military threat. But, the longer that Cuba received Soviet bloc weapon systems and training, the greater the risk they would pose.

³⁰ Quoted in Hybel, 87.

³¹ Kornbluh, 268.

³² Hybel, 86.

On the superpower front, the United States operated under the assumption that the Soviet Union would avoid direct confrontation, showing similar restraint towards U.S. action within its own sphere of influence that the U.S. had demonstrated during the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Based on the perceived threat to national interests, the realization that political and economic pressures were not going to bring Castro around to U.S. desires, and balance of power considerations, Eisenhower decided in January 1960 to overthrow the “madman.”³³ Hard-core realist calculations had led to a decision to intervene—aimed at regime change—but the method and timing of the intervention were yet to be determined. Those details were to develop over time through a policy formulation process largely influenced by organizational behavior and reasoning by historical analogy. The dominant analogy was Guatemala.

Guatemala, 1954.

In 1954, CIA-trained guerilla forces ousted the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz regime and replaced it with the U.S.-supported opposition headed by Castillo Armas. Arbenz, while claiming political neutrality, had pursued communist-oriented policies by implementing agrarian land reforms, adding known communists to his administration, and buying weapons from the communist bloc.³⁴ Like Cuba in 1960, intelligence estimates leading to the intervention concluded that the “political situation in Guatemala adversely affects U.S. interests and constitutes a potential threat to U.S.

³³ Higgins, 48; see also Bissell, 153.

³⁴ Bissell, 81-83; Hybel, 88.

security.”³⁵ Also like Cuba, those interests encompassed both security and economic concerns.³⁶ By mid-1953 the State Department had concluded that the “trend toward Communist strength” in Guatemala “would ultimately endanger the unity of the Western Hemisphere against Soviet aggression, and the security of our strategic position in the Caribbean.”³⁷

To counter the perceived communist threat, Operation PBSUCCESS was launched on June 18, 1954. Authorized by Eisenhower and executed by the CIA, covert Operation PBSUCCESS combined psychological operations with a small invasion force of CIA-trained Guatemalan exiles to overthrow Arbenz. Capitalizing on the recent success of Operation TPAJAX that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq of Iran, the CIA pursued an even more aggressive covert plan in Guatemala.³⁸ They used persistent psychological operations in conjunction with a small number of ground troops and air strikes to create the impression that a large-scale military invasion was underway. The strategy was to “produce a victory by psychological demoralization and political destabilization, not by military defeat.”³⁹ After a small Castillo Armas “army” of 150 men crossed the boarder into Guatemala, several bombing raids were conducted against

³⁵ Bissell, 81.

³⁶ While the threat to U.S. economic interests posed by agrarian land reform and nationalization of United Fruit Company properties has been noted as particularly important in the decision to intervene in Guatemala, it is clear that security concerns reigned paramount. See Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Martha Cottam, “Decision Making in ‘Successful’ Interventions: The Cases of Guatemala and Chile,” in *Superpowers and Revolution*, ed. Jonathan R. Adelman (New York: Praeger, 1986), 85-111; Immerman; Hybel; Bissell.

³⁷ Bissell, 81-82.

³⁸ Cullather, 38-39.

³⁹ Etheredge, 7.

targets in Guatemala City. Continuous radio propaganda and jamming of military communications prevented Arbenz from accurately assessing the situation and led him to conclude that there was in fact a U.S. supported, full-scale invasion in the works. Arbenz eventually "lost his nerve" and capitulated on June 28 at the hands of his own military leaders.⁴⁰

The Guatemalan operation succeeded because of persistent bombing, intense psychological operations, and a little "dumb luck."⁴¹ The first two factors perpetuated the illusion of rebel strength well beyond what the operations on the ground dictated. The propaganda never produced any significant internal uprising and the Guatemalan army immediately halted the rebel ground forces, but Arbenz could not stop the destruction from the air. There was a point, though, where success seemed unlikely. Two CIA-supplied rebel aircraft had been shot down early in the conflict causing the covert operation to stall and lose momentum. The CIA went to Eisenhower requesting additional U.S. support for the mission. Eisenhower, recognizing that additional action may tip the U.S. hand in the operation, nevertheless authorized additional aircraft to continue air attacks and bolster the probability of mission success.⁴² Eisenhower's response was that "when you commit the flag, you commit to win."⁴³ "With his air force grounded, his capital under attack, and the Voice of Liberation reporting massive

⁴⁰ See Etheredge, 6-7; and Cottam, 96-97.

⁴¹ In the words of CIA operative, Richard Drain, quoted in Kornbluh, 8. See also Cottam; and Bissell.

⁴² See Cottam, 96; and Bissell, 87-88. Allen Dulles told Eisenhower that the chances of success were "zero" without additional aircraft and only "20 percent" with the aircraft. Eisenhower appreciated Dulles' honesty and decided to supply the planes.

⁴³ Quoted in Lucien Vandenbrouke, "The 'Confessions' of Allen Dulles: New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs," *Diplomatic History* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 373.

defections from his army,” Arbenz put the nail in his own coffin by ordering weapons to be distributed to the “people’s organizations and the political parties”—effectively arming the peasant/communist militia.⁴⁴ The conservative military leaders found that order unacceptable and subsequently demanded Arbenz’s resignation.

The U.S. had succeeded through covert means to overthrow a targeted regime and maintain the international legitimacy afforded by “plausible deniability.” While “luck and sheer brute force—the bombing,” largely accounted for the success, the lesson taken away from the operation by the CIA and President Eisenhower was less introspective.⁴⁵ Building on the earlier success in Iran, this relatively easy victory *proved* to the administration that CIA covert operations were a useful method of Cold War intervention in underdeveloped countries. Operation PBSUCCESS historian, Nick Cullathers, noted, “In method, scale, and conception it had no antecedent, and its triumph confirmed the belief of many in the Eisenhower administration that covert operations offered a safe, inexpensive substitute for armed force in resisting Communist inroads in the Third World.”⁴⁶

Washington had consistently characterized and structured the “Castro problem” along similar lines as it had done with the “Arbenz problem” in Guatemala prior to the 1954 intervention.⁴⁷ Having defined the problem similarly, it is no surprise that Eisenhower and the CIA chose to deal with problem similarly. The apparent ease with which the CIA-directed covert operation toppled the Arbenz regime convinced President

⁴⁴ Bissell, 88.

⁴⁵ Cottam, 98.

⁴⁶ Cullather, 7.

⁴⁷ Hybel, 88.

Eisenhower that the same mechanism could be used to bring about similar results in Cuba.⁴⁸ So, in conjunction with his decision of January 1960 to overthrow the Castro regime, Eisenhower turned to the CIA to plan the intervention. Guatemala became the “analogy and precedent” for Cuba, especially at the organizational level.⁴⁹ At this point, organizational factors must be introduced into the analysis to fully capture the impact of organizational routine, organizational capabilities, and information control on the policy formulation process. From an organizational standpoint, policy decisions tend to represent marginal changes to previous organizational outcomes. The CIA success in Guatemala provided the organizational outcome that anchored planning for intervention in Cuba.

Organizational Processes: Guatemala...Take Two!

Central Intelligence Agency.

In little over a decade since its inception, the CIA had become a mature bureaucratic cog in the national security system. While the U.S. military deterred WWII and fought large-scale combat operations in Korea, the CIA made a name for itself along the periphery of the Cold War, overturning suspect regimes through covert means. Those successes coupled with the CIA’s unique organizational capabilities positioned it to dominate the organizational level policy formulation activities associated with Cuba. The CIA controlled intelligence gathering and dissemination, “promoted Castro as a serious

⁴⁸ Hybel, 95-96.

⁴⁹ Kornbluh, 8.

threat, defined the objective to be his elimination, and proposed the solution.”⁵⁰ And, the organizational roots of that proposed solution lay firmly planted in Guatemala. The myth of the success of 1954 provided a concrete model for action. Personnel assignments, policy formulation, policy advocacy and even perceptions of likely presidential responses were all framed by the Guatemalan adventure.

Immediately following Eisenhower’s January decision, CIA Director Allan Dulles formed a special Cuban task force to develop a covert policy option. The task force was staffed—from the director to propaganda officer—with individuals directly involved in the 1954 operation against Arbenz.⁵¹ The lead planner and critical player in the decision process was Richard Bissell, Deputy Director for Plans. Bissell had garnered a strong “can-do” reputation from his recent personal successes on the U-2 program. He had been a special advisor to Dulles on the Guatemalan operation and consciously modeled his plans for Cuba after that intervention.⁵² Tracy Barnes, who had been special assistant to Bissell’s predecessor during Guatemala performed the same duties for Bissell. General Charles P. Cabell held the position of Deputy Director for Operations during both Guatemala and the Bay of Pigs. In addition, the propaganda operations and political actions for both operations were also run by the same men—David Phillips and E. Howard Hunt, respectively.⁵³

⁵⁰ Lloyd S. Etheredge, *Can Governments Learn? American Foreign Policy and Central American Revolutions* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 2.

⁵¹ Hybel, 89.

⁵² Bissell, 153.

⁵³ Etheredge, 7.

After three months of policy planning “very much influenced”—in the words of Bissell—by the Guatemalan analogy, the CIA presented their proposal for “A Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime” to Eisenhower in March of 1960.⁵⁴ The proposal consisted of four parts: 1) creating a Cuban government in exile; 2) initiating a propaganda campaign against Castro; 3) building an intelligence and action network in Cuba responsive to the exile opposition, and; 4) developing and training a paramilitary force for infiltration into Cuba for future guerilla operations.⁵⁵ “These were the same four components that delineated the Guatemala plan implemented six years earlier.”⁵⁶ The plan was not a direct copy of PBSUCCESS, but “an improvement built around the elements of the Guatemala operation that had been considered effective: radio, airpower, and an insurrection army.”⁵⁷ The similarity in strategy was driven by the belief that Castro would react to an invasion much the same way Arbenz had. “The chance of toppling Castro,” Bissell said, “was predicated on the assumption that, faced with that kind of pressure, he would suffer the same loss of nerve.”⁵⁸ That assumption held sway despite the growing intelligence that Castro and his regime shared little in common with Arbenz.⁵⁹ Eisenhower approved the basic CIA strategy on March 17, but emphasized the importance of maintaining operational security and plausible deniability.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Bissell, 153.

⁵⁵ Kornbluh, 24; Hybel, 89; Wyden, 25.

⁵⁶ Hybel, 89.

⁵⁷ Cullather, 110

⁵⁸ Quoted in Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946-1962* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 177.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 177-78.

⁶⁰ Bissell, 153; see also Kornbluh, 269-70.

Events in Cuba over the next several months highlighted Castro's ever firming political, economic, and military grip over the island and cast doubt on the effectiveness of a small-scale Guatemala-like operation. The CIA—operating relatively autonomously during the presidential transition period—initiated a radical shift in policy. The Cuba strategy evolved rapidly from small paramilitary operations to a full-scale amphibious assault. This expansion in scope, which went well beyond previous CIA experience in Guatemala, or elsewhere, did little to dampen confidence. While the in-country dynamics and policy options for Cuba had radically departed from those found earlier in Guatemala,⁶¹ the power of the analogy prevailed at the organizational level in more insidious and damaging ways. The illusion of invincibility coupled with the assumption that the new president would respond in the face of mission adversity like his predecessor—with the commitment of U.S. forces—conditioned the CIA leadership to fervently advocate high-risk plans. In retrospect, a former State Department official commented that “there was this sort of hubris everywhere, and the mythology of the Guatemala operation was part of it. Fundamentally, we didn't take this country seriously.”⁶²

In addition to reputational power gained through previous intervention successes, the CIA held another, more prized bureaucratic advantage—the control of information. Due to the covert nature of the operation and the continued emphasis on secrecy, the CIA enjoyed a virtual monopoly over critical information. This increased the CIA's leverage

⁶¹ By December 1960, CIA intelligence estimates indicated that Castro remained “firmly in control” and that “internal opposition” was “still generally ineffective;” quoted in Bissell, 160.

⁶² James G. Blight and Peter Kornbluh, ed., *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs Reexamined* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 42.

in the policy process. Policy assessment was contingent upon accurate intelligence about internal Castro opposition and the readiness and strength of exile forces—intelligence firmly controlled by the CIA. Secrecy limited access, and limited access resulted in limited truth. Agencies—including the CIA’s own intelligence branch and the Cuban desk in the State Department—that could have provided needed expertise for policy evaluation were excluded.⁶³ “The agency never supplied any written documents to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and collected the documents circulated in the White House meetings after each briefing.”⁶⁴ In typical organizational fashion, the CIA utilized its unique capabilities and control of information to structure the policy formulation and assessment process “in a way that maximized the likelihood the president would choose the agency’s preferred solution.”⁶⁵ As Schlesinger noted, “The same men...both planned the operation and judged its chances for success.”⁶⁶ The CIA men were committed to action against Castro, convinced that they were the rightful purveyors of that action, and willing to use all organizational tools available to persuade the president of the same.

Military

Between the initial approval of the CIA strategy in March 1960 and the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, the military had little involvement in the development of the covert plans for Cuba. The military was tapped to provide training support for ground and air forces, but had little direct engagement in the policy formulation and

⁶³ Janis, 32.

⁶⁴ Lucien Vandenbrouke, “Anatomy of a Failure: The Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs,” *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 475.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 477.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Janis, 32.

assessment process. In fact, working level officers on the Joint Staff were first informed of the CIA plans on January 11, 1961 when an interdepartmental working group was initiated.⁶⁷ Shortly after his inauguration, though, President Kennedy tasked the Defense Department to review the CIA's military plans for Operation Trinidad and provide a prompt evaluation.⁶⁸ General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, told Kennedy at the meeting that in his personal opinion, "no force of 600-800 men is adequate for success" without additional support from the U.S."⁶⁹ That was—oddly enough—the last time that the JCS perspective was so clearly articulated.

On February 3, the JCS sent Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, a memorandum detailing their assessment of Operation Trinidad. The widely held view is that the JCS reached a "favorable assessment" of the plan.⁷⁰ That partial truth became central to the post-Bay of Pigs claim of JCS ineptitude. The full truth, though, is much more critical and nuanced. The executive summary stated that the "evaluation of the current plan results in a *favorable assessment*, modified by the specific conclusions set forth above, of the likelihood of achieving *initial military success*. It is obvious that *ultimate success* will depend upon political factors; i.e. a sizeable popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces...Despite the shortcomings...this plan has a *fair chance* of

⁶⁷ *FRUS* Editorial Note, Document 16.

⁶⁸ This meeting took place on January 28, 1961; see Bundy, Barnes, and Lemnitzer memos of the meeting, *FRUS*, Documents 30-31.

⁶⁹ *Memorandum for the Record of the Cuban Meeting on 28 January 1961*, by Barnes, *FRUS*, Document 31.

⁷⁰ This conclusion was even reported in the Kirpatrick Report, the CIA's internal Inspector General review of the Bay of Pigs; see Kornbluh, 156.

ultimate success (emphasis added).⁷¹ It is important to note that “initial military success” referred to the establishment of a beachhead, only. “Ultimate success” referred to the ultimate objective—overthrow of the Castro regime. These conclusions, while far from ringing endorsements, were predicated on certain underlying assumptions that proved—in the end—prescient: 1) Trinidad was the best beachhead location on the island; 2) tactical surprise would be achieved; 3) local air superiority would ensure unhindered landing operations; 4) there would be a general internal uprising; and 5) in the event that the rebel forces could not hold the beachhead, they would have an escape hatch into the Escambray Mountains to link up with other guerilla forces. In addition, the JCS evaluation concluded that “the personnel and plans for logistic support are marginal at best.” If the amphibious assault would happen to face “moderate, determined resistance,” then “logistics support as currently planned will be inadequate.”⁷²

As damning as this assessment was, the full impact was never accurately portrayed to Kennedy. In fact, at the follow-up meeting on February 8, the military position was characterized by nearly everyone but the military. Bissell reported that the JCS “believed that this plan had a fair chance of success.”⁷³ McGeorge Bundy had informed Kennedy earlier in the day in preparation for the meeting that, “Defense and CIA now feel quite enthusiastic about the invasion.”⁷⁴ The Joint Chiefs were far from

⁷¹ *Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara*, February 3, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 35.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Memorandum of Meeting With President Kennedy*, February 8, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 40.

⁷⁴ *Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Kennedy*, February 8, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 39.

enthusiastic, but they deferred to McNamara in the discussions, and—at this early point in his career—McNamara was “remarkably silent.”⁷⁵

The military’s prime interest was to ensure military effectiveness but, in bureaucratic terms, they had no ownership of this operation and consequently acquiesced to those who did. As Bissell attested, “it was the CIA, above all other government agencies that had the action.”⁷⁶ The Joint Chiefs “didn’t dream it up, they weren’t in charge of it, they didn’t plan it, and they were called in later to pass judgment on somebody else’s idea.”⁷⁷ Since military bureaucratic interests were not at stake, the JCS never aggressively countered the CIA position. As McGeorge Bundy, an active participant in the policy deliberation, observed: “The Joint Chiefs really didn’t regard this as their main business, and therefore if they responded honestly and straightforwardly to the president’s questions, they didn’t have a campaigner’s need to go on and say, ‘Please don’t do this.’”⁷⁸ The clearest indictment of the JCS bureaucratic perspective comes from the Chairman’s own words: “You couldn’t expect us...to say this plan is no damn good, you ought to call it off; *that’s not the way you do things in government...* The CIA were doing their best in the planning, and we were accepting it. *The responsibility was not ours.* (emphasis added)”⁷⁹ This perspective, while certainly disturbing given the national interests at stake, nonetheless, evolved fairly predictably in light of the bureaucratic nature of the policy formulation process.

⁷⁵ Bissell, 166.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Bissell, 198.

⁷⁹ General Lemnitzer quoted in Vandenbrouke, “Anatomy of a Failure,” 477.

The most telling aspect of this process was the Kennedy-directed shift in planning to a “less spectacular” alternative and the newfound role of the military in evaluating those changes. As the plan for Cuba went through the various changes in its rapid evolution from Operation Trinidad to Operation Zapata (Bay of Pigs), each of the foundational assumptions of the original JCS assessment were undermined. General surprise was forfeited by the shift to D-2 air strikes and the fake defection. Although specific surprise was maintained in terms of the location of the amphibious operation, Castro was able to use the extra time to mobilize forces and detain thousands of his suspected political opposition. The eighty percent reduction in air sorties ensured that Castro had air assets available to oppose the landing operations on the beach. The failure to gain air superiority led to predictable results—the sinking of supply ships and general disruption of beachhead operations. Also, the detainment of political opposition, the elimination of the “shock factor” that would have accompanied massive air strikes and operations near the city of Trinidad, and the physical isolation of the exile brigade, essentially guaranteed that no general internal uprising would occur. Finally, the escape hatch had been removed because of the terrain and distance that lay between the brigade at the Bay of Pigs and the Escambray Mountains.

Given the level of detail in the original JCS assessment, it seems reasonable that changes as significant as these would have generated stern policy opposition from the military—ownership, or not. But, a closer look at the bureaucratic maneuvering sheds some light on the JCS acquiescence. The CIA clearly held the bureaucratic upper hand. General Ingelido, the Secretary in the office of the Joint Chiefs at the time, described how

the CIA-generated invasion alternatives kept coming back to the JCS until the preferred policy option was supported. He recalled that as the CIA “would come up with a plan or a couple of plans, it would be discussed in the White House. They would send it over for Joint Chief concurrence.” General White, the Air Force Chief of Staff, was particularly puzzled over the “small air application,” repeatedly voicing his concern that “we control the air, and are able to get ships and people on the ground to operate unimpeded.”

General Ingelido continued, “No matter how you came out strong for taking a forceful approach and really going all out to do this, rather than trying to do it with skimpy forces or without good planning and good logistics, it always kept getting watered down. Back it would come this time with six alternatives, or they would pick what seemed the strongest to that bunch, then back it would come again from one of the others with four alternatives. This went on and on...As long as you [JCS] were taking the approach that wasn’t looked for, it would just keep coming back over and over. For the Bay of Pigs—God knows how many alternative plans were selected.”⁸⁰

The interesting aspect of this observation is the fact that the JCS saw many variations of invasion plans and that regardless of their input, it was clear that someone had an answer they wanted. In the end, it was not so much that the military purposively led the President astray, or consciously shucked their organizational responsibility, but acquiesced in the face of the bureaucratically stronger (in this case) CIA’s vigorous promotion and the president’s apparent desire to take some action. Even the gruff

⁸⁰ Michael J. Ingelido, “U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview,” by Lieutenant Colonel Roy Thomas, January, 1985. United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Document K239.0512-1627, 144-146.

General Curtis LeMay, then Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, was put in his place by the CIA. In the absence of General White, the Chief, LeMay, sat in on one the JCS discussions about changing the invasion location. After hearing the details of the CIA plan for the first time and being asked which proposed beach site (other than Trinidad) was preferable, LeMay responded: "Well I know that way back in history Henry Morgan took Panama with seven hundred people but that was a little different situation. I see no chance of seven hundred being successful here unless there's a general uprising and I presume you have this arranged so it's going to happen." The "CIA man," whom LeMay does not identify, responded: "This doesn't concern you. Just answer our question as which beach is best." LeMay noted that the CIA got their answer, and that "was all the Joint Chiefs were asked." LeMay later concluded based on his limited exposure to the operation (that included sitting in for General White on the day of the invasion) that the Bay of Pigs was "planned outside the military, operated outside the military—but the military got blamed for it."⁸¹

Organizational factors reasonably explain the core policy formulation process including the genesis of the CIA plan, its expansion in scope, the vigorous CIA advocacy, and the military's quiet advice. But, organizational factors, even when combined with rational, realist-based calculations, do not fully explain the Bay of Pigs intervention. In fact, if the critical organizations—the CIA and military—had fully determined policy, there never would have been a Bay of Pigs invasion; the exiles would have landed on the

⁸¹ Curtis E. LeMay, "U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #592," June 8, 1972. United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Document K239.0512-592, 21-24.

shores near Trinidad—the militarily preferred location—and there never would have been D-2 air strikes that provided Castro time to strengthen his hold on power before the actual amphibious operation. To fully understand the last minute policy changes and intervention decisions, one must move to the individual level of analysis and investigate the dynamics of political bargaining and presidential persuasion that occurred during the early days of the Kennedy administration.

Bureaucratic Politics: Deniability Trumps Viability

President Kennedy, upon his inauguration, entered a decision context severely constrained by organizational processes and structured by previous decisions. He was fully committed to overthrowing Castro, but limited in policy options. The only alternatives to the CIA covert operation were to do nothing—continue the economic and diplomatic pressure—or to launch a full-scale U.S. overt military invasion. Both alternatives were politically unacceptable, the first for domestic reasons and the second for international reasons.⁸² Consequently, the apparently rational decision a year earlier by Eisenhower to intervene in Cuba had now been transposed via organizational processes into a strong decisional path dependency for Kennedy.

That path dependency was exacerbated by the fact that Kennedy inherited not just a plan from Eisenhower, but an ongoing operation. Dulles and Bissell wasted no time in presenting Kennedy with the so called “disposal problem.”⁸³ After months of training, the Cuban strike force in Guatemala was restless and “it was becoming impossible to

⁸² See CIA *Memorandum for the Record*, Meeting on Cuba, February, 7, 1961, *FRUS*, Document 38.

⁸³ Blight and Kornbluh, 64.

sustain the discipline and morale of the troops.”⁸⁴ The CIA argued that politically “they could not be brought back to the United States, they could not be dispersed into smaller groups, and they could not be disbanded. A commitment to action was the only viable course, and time was running out.”⁸⁵

Time was also running out for other reasons. First, the Guatemalan government was growing impatient with the troops being trained on their soil and pressured the CIA to move them elsewhere. Second, the Cuban military build-up was approaching a critical juncture. Within months, Cuban pilots being trained in the Soviet Union would return to operate the MIG jet aircraft already arriving in Cuba. That combination would pose a daunting threat to any U.S.-led invasion. And finally, the forthcoming rainy season would greatly hinder beachhead operations. By all estimates, the invasion—if it were to go forward—would have to do so by April.

Kennedy thus found himself in a time-constrained, high-stakes military intervention decision context with no presidential experience to fall back on. He obviously had to lean on his small circle of policy advisers for guidance. The bureaucratic politics level of analysis focuses on the dynamics of that advisory process, highlighting the bargaining and persuasion of key players with diverse interests, unequal influence and varied perceptions. In this case, presidential advocacy broke down into four basic camps.

⁸⁴ Bissell, 163.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

CIA leaders, Dulles and Bissell, represented the first policy camp. Both (particularly, Bissell) were fervent advocates for action. Driven by Cold War perceptions of national interests, the illusion of invincibility, and Guatemala-based analogical reasoning, the two pushed hard for a “go” decision. Convinced that commitment to action would mean commitment to success, Dulles and Bissell were less concerned with the details of the plan. As such, the CIA leaders allowed their commitment to the operation overshadow rational assessments of risk. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy observed during the decision process that Bissell was “so emotionally involved with this project that he...changed from an analyst to an advocate.”⁸⁶ In retrospect, Bissell admitted in his memoirs: “So emotionally involved was I that I may have let my desire to proceed override my good judgment on several matters...I think I retained too much confidence in the whole operation up to the end, more than was rational.”⁸⁷ Reputation, intellectual prowess, firm control over information, and the “disposal problem” all bolstered Dulles and Bissell’s influence over the policy deliberations.

At the opposite end of the policy spectrum were those who opposed the U.S.-sponsored military intervention—largely on moral and legal bases. U.S. action against a small neighboring country not only violated international law, but also potentially painted the U.S. with the same broad brush as the Soviets. American aggression against Cuba would be perceived by many to be on par with the recent Soviet aggression against

⁸⁶ Blight and Kornbluh, 43.

⁸⁷ Bissell, 185.

Hungary. The most ardent opposition to the invasion came from Senator William Fulbright, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who learned of the invasion planning through a committee staffer.⁸⁸ Fulbright provided Kennedy with a 3,766-word memorandum outlining reasons why an invasion of Cuba was a bad idea. Kennedy later invited Fulbright to make his case at the April 4 meeting where a final vote was taken to determine support for the mission.⁸⁹ While other advisers privately agreed with Fulbright, none voted against the intervention. Two of those quiet abstainers were White House advisers Arthur Schlesinger and Richard Goodwin. As new, junior appointees, both felt uncomfortable in the presence of CIA and military experts and, therefore, made their reservations known more quietly—mostly in private discussions and correspondence with President Kennedy.⁹⁰ Schlesinger provided Kennedy several lengthy, personal memos describing his reservations, but did not have the confidence or political power to overcome the CIA advocacy.

The next policy camp is closely related to the last. Led by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, this group emphasized the importance of “plausible deniability.” Recognizing that the strong inherited path dependency meant that some action was likely, Secretary Rusk, along with Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State, Adolph Berle, head of State Department’s Latin American Task Force, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, all sought to minimize U.S. exposure in an effort to reduce political risk. Charged with protecting the diplomatic interests of the nation, it is no surprise that

⁸⁸ Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 132.

⁸⁹ Vandenbrouke, “Anatomy of Failure,” 483-84.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

State Department officials would focus on America's international reputation.

Consequently, this "plausible deniability" policy camp argued persistently to scale back the military aspects of the operation to the point where it could be viewed as "plausibly Cuban."

Finally, the Joint Chiefs and lower level CIA officials directly involved in the operations were driven by concerns about military feasibility. From the start, they were inclined to believe that direct U.S. military support was going to be needed to ultimately achieve success. The Chiefs made their assessments known early in the process but did not belabor the point. The JCS had other pressing issues around the world and left this one to the CIA. As General Lemnitzer recalled, "there were all kinds of difficulties in the world at the time...and [the Bay of Pigs] operation was far from being high priority."⁹¹

Much of the scholarly analysis of the Bay of Pigs paints President Kennedy as a naïve victim of CIA and JCS influence. Bissell led him down the primrose path and the Joint Chiefs failed to warn him otherwise. The truth is less flattering, though. Advisers bargain and persuade; the president decides. And, personal perceptions and interests influence what the president decides. Kennedy did not enter the highly constrained decision context as a blank slate. He entered it with specific interests and motivations of his own. The fact is that the impact of each of the four different policy perspectives on the final decision was ultimately determined by how well each aligned with Kennedy's personal/domestic political interests.

⁹¹ Ibid., 482.

Two specific personal interests—domestic political concerns and the desire for international prestige—structured Kennedy's approach. First, he had campaigned vigorously against communism and attacked Nixon for failure of the Eisenhower administration to act against Castro. Knowing full well the administration had a covert plan in the works for the overthrow of Castro,⁹² Kennedy nevertheless fired a direct shot at Nixon in October 1960: "We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far, these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our government."⁹³ This political campaign gamble, while successful—because Nixon could not defend himself without divulging the operation⁹⁴—haunted Kennedy once in office. Kennedy had created his own domestic political straightjacket. He had to follow through on his campaign rhetoric with some firm action against Cuba. Given his campaign words, the disposal problem—as presented by the CIA—particularly concerned him. If the mission were outright canceled, Kennedy would potentially face over a thousand disgruntled Cuban freedom fighters walking around Miami spreading stories of the President's cowardice. That scenario would paint Kennedy in stark contrast to the plan's originator and war hero, Eisenhower, and spell certain domestic political doom. Hence, Kennedy's willingness to accept Bissell's high-risk plan is as much the result of a convenient alignment of interests as it is the result of bureaucratic power and control. The two factors complemented each other to the detriment of the nation.

⁹² Allen Dulles briefed presidential candidate John F. Kennedy on the general details of the plan on 23 July 1960; see Kornbluh, 273-74.

⁹³ Wyden, 65.

⁹⁴ Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 352.

Second, Kennedy campaigned on the promise that his administration would take a new, enlightened approach to foreign policy. Within the hemisphere he advocated an "Alliance for Progress" which he described as "an alliance of nations with a common interest in freedom and economic advance in a great common effort to develop the resources of the entire hemisphere, strengthen the forces of democracy, and widen the vocational and educational opportunities of every person in all the Americas."⁹⁵ The message of the New Frontiersmen was clear: Latin America was to be transformed into "a vast crucible of revolutionary ideas and efforts—a tribute to the power of the creative energies of free men and women—an example to all the world that liberty and progress walk hand in hand."⁹⁶ These ideological notions of benevolent hemispheric leadership contrasted abruptly with a plan for U.S.-sponsored aggression in Cuba. It is no surprise, therefore, that the men behind the Alliance for Progress—Berle, Mann, and Goodwin⁹⁷—advocated either against intervention or for all efforts that would maximize plausible deniability. Having formally launched the Alliance for Progress on March 13, 1961, Kennedy embraced the mantra of plausible deniability in an effort to avoid an international accusation of hypocrisy and inherent loss of personal and national prestige. That prestige was particularly critical because of the upcoming negotiations with Khrushchev over the fate of Berlin. Exposing direct U.S. engagement in Cuba would jeopardize Kennedy's leverage in those discussions.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Kennedy campaign speech, Tampa Florida, October 18, 1960, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, 83.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 124.

⁹⁷ See Schlesinger, Chapter 8, for a thorough treatment of the development of the Alliance for Progress.

⁹⁸ Karabell, 194.

Domestic political interests had aligned Kennedy with the CIA and especially the disposal problem. Reputational interests aligned Kennedy with the doubting Thomases and the concern for plausible deniability. The Joint Chiefs' emphasis on military viability—hence greater military effort—conflicted with the State Department and CIA interests and Kennedy's need for balancing the two. On the one hand, the JCS inputs were dismissed as "too noisy" for Rusk and the rest of the plausible deniability camp. On the other hand, their assessments of military risk endangered the CIA push for action. Unfortunately, Kennedy had internalized both interests, marginalizing the desire for greater military candor. Additionally, the arguments of those few that advocated strongly against intervention fell on deaf ears because non-action didn't resolve the disposal problem. In the end, Kennedy decided to accept increased military risk in exchange for perceived reductions in political risk. Schlesinger presented Kennedy with the stark awareness of this trade-off as early as March 15, 1961, the day that alternatives to Operation Trinidad were briefed. In a memorandum to the President, Schlesinger advised: "The trouble with the operation is that the less the military risk, the greater the political risk, and vice versa. It seems to me that the utilization of the men under conditions of minimum political risk is clearly the thing to aim at."⁹⁹ The aura of plausible deniability, the political influence of its advocates—Dean Rusk, Thomas Mann, Adolph Berle, and McGeorge Bundy—and the conscious cost-benefit approach alluded to by Schlesinger drove all of the late changes in the plan as it evolved from Operation Trinidad to the final version of Operation Zapata. The resulting watered down plan

⁹⁹ *Memorandum for the President*, by Arthur Schlesinger, March 15, 1961; see Blight and Kornbluh, 223.

essentially guaranteed failure on both key objectives: the overthrow of Castro and the maintenance of plausible deniability.

Another, less flattering conscious decision was the disposal of the exile freedom fighters in Cuba. Many have argued that Kennedy was misled about the chances of success and the ability of the exiles to transition into the mountains in the event that the beachhead was overrun. This is true to a degree (the CIA did not push the hard core facts for fear that it might lead to termination of the operation),¹⁰⁰ but there is also evidence that Kennedy was reasonably well informed of the potential outcome of an unsuccessful invasion. Notes from a meeting on March 16 are particularly disturbing. They indicate that "the President wanted to know what the consequences would be if the operation failed." Admiral Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, placed the odds of success at fifty percent. Kennedy then "inquired what would happen if it developed after the invasion that the Cuban exile force were pinned down and being slaughtered on the beach." He further wanted to know where they would be taken if they were "re-embarked." According to Admiral Burke's account, "It was decided they would not be re-embarked because there was no place to go. Once they landed they were there."¹⁰¹ Later on March 29, Kennedy questioned the ability of the brigade to "fade into the brush" if things didn't go well. Bissell responded, "that if the operation failed, the force would probably have to be withdrawn."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See Bissell; and Vandenbrouke, "Confessions," for specific confessions of the two CIA leaders that they did not go out of their way to dispel any illusions Kennedy had about the operation.

¹⁰¹ Editorial Note in *FRUS*, Document 66.

¹⁰² Editorial Note in *FRUS*, Document 74.

Despite the indications that the escape hatch may not be available and the conscious decision to trade political for military risk, Kennedy nonetheless concluded: "If we have to get rid of these 800 men, it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, especially if that is where they want to go."¹⁰³ This statement alone does not convict the former president, but does shed light on his underlying motivations regarding the disposal problem. Those motivations were further highlighted at a luncheon discussion with the Cuba Study Group run by General Maxwell Taylor a month after the Bay of Pigs failure. Kennedy was asked, "Was there any doubt about the necessity of some such military action against Castro?" Kennedy replied that he and some people in the State Department had doubts, "but there were pressures such as what to do with the forces being trained, the rainy season coming up and the conduct of covert operations...It was much better, for example, to put the guerrillas on the beach in Cuba and let them fight for Cuba than bring them back to the United States and have them state that the United States would not support their activities. The end result might have been much worse had we done this than it actually was."¹⁰⁴ Worse for whom? The 114 members of the invasionary force—including four American, CIA-contracted pilots—that died on the shores of Cuba? For Kennedy, the Bay of Pigs failure was a surprising domestic political success. After publicly taking responsibility for the failure, his

¹⁰³ Schlesinger, 257-58.

¹⁰⁴ *Memorandum for the Record*, Prepared by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, Washington, May 16, 1961, documented in Mark J. White, ed., *The Kennedy's and Cuba: The Declassified History* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 30.

approval ratings increased five percent, causing him to comment, "The worse I do, the more popular I get."¹⁰⁵

Summary

The decision to intervene in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs is a tale of complex international, national, organizational and individual dynamics influenced by diverse and, at times, overlapping interests. Realist-based concerns about a communist threat ninety miles offshore put the wheels in motion. Past CIA successes in Iran and especially Guatemala provided the models for action. Organizational routine and reasoning by analogy prevailed over the initial policy formulation and operational planning processes. The easy success of Guatemala led to overconfidence, complacency, and hubris. Three key organizations structured the decision context. The CIA provided the basic plan, training, and information necessary for policy assessment and ardently advocated for action. The State Department, rightly concerned about the international political effects of any revealed American involvement, advocated "plausible deniability" as the overriding objective. The military was driven by prospects for success, focusing predominantly on assessments of military viability. The JCS advocated the original Trinidad plan, but acquiesced when political considerations obviously overrode military essentials. The military was told that Kennedy had decided against Trinidad and that they only needed to pick the best of the other alternatives. After being told that the

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Melvin Small, *The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 112.

President had made a decision, they—in traditional military fashion—saluted smartly and fell in line with the Commander-in-Chief.

Kennedy had to reconcile the divergent advocacy he was getting with his own personal interests. He had put himself in a domestic political fix with the vociferous campaign rhetoric about being tough on Cuba. He had to act for political reasons, not for rational, realist concerns. Kennedy concluded that the exiles had to be dumped in Cuba, but still held out hope that it could be done without tipping the American hand. In the end, political deniability trumped military viability. The compromise plan failed on all accounts. The disastrous decision was influenced by what Kennedy did not know (due to CIA control of information) and what he did not want to know (because of the need to rid himself of the disposal problem).

There is one other, less documented factor that may help explain President Kennedy's approval of the plan in spite of the military risk. This factor also sheds light on the last minute delays and uncertainties associated with the final intervention decision. The missing element is that Kennedy may have reasonably expected Castro to be dead by the time of the invasion. The CIA ran an operation to assassinate Castro through mafia links from August 1960 to April 1961.¹⁰⁶ Several attempts were made on Castro's life during the March/April timeframe. In fact, Bissell noted that as he "moved forward with plans for the brigade," he "hoped the Mafia would achieve success."¹⁰⁷ The assassination plot was intended to parallel and supplement the invasion.¹⁰⁸ Less well documented—for

¹⁰⁶ Kornbluh, 9-10, 274.

¹⁰⁷ Bissell, 157.

¹⁰⁸ Higgins, 88.

obvious reasons—is whether Kennedy was aware of the operation. According to Senator George Smathers, a presidential friend, Kennedy told him on the White House grounds in March 1961 that he had been “given to believe” by the CIA that Castro would be dead before the troops landed at the Bay of Pigs. As Smathers recalled, “Someone was supposed to have knocked him off and there was supposed to be absolute pandemonium.”¹⁰⁹ In addition, Bissell’s Deputy, Richard Helms, testified before a 1978 House Select Committee on assassinations that Kennedy did indeed know of the CIA plans to kill Castro. If Kennedy did know that the head of the beast was about to fall, that would help explain his approval of such a seemingly “implausible” plan.¹¹⁰ It seems reasonable to conclude that Kennedy waited to the very last minute for confirmation that Castro was dead, and when that confirmation never arrived, the path dependency of the operation was too strong to overcome. The best remaining choice from his perspective was to cut his losses associated with a feeble plan—hence the last minute reduction of “noisy” air strikes.

The critical assumption made by the CIA proved in error. President Kennedy’s commitment to action did not constitute—like Eisenhower before him—a commitment to success. The odd irony—as pointed out by one of the American pilots involved in the mission—is that ultimately “what is needed for credible denial of United States involvement was that the mission to overthrow Castro must succeed, not fail.”¹¹¹ As demonstrated in Guatemala, success has the uncanny ability to cover many wrongs. By

¹⁰⁹ Beschloss, 139.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Persons, 128. Grayston Lynch who went ashore with the brigade echoes this conclusion in Lynch, 154-55.

eliminating any chance for success, Kennedy's last minute operational revisions assured, rather than obscured, U.S. culpability. In the end, Castro's regime was strengthened rather than overthrown, and the covert veil of "plausible deniability" had been torn away leaving the United States—and Kennedy in particular—exposed.

CHAPTER 5

SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In January 1968, domestic liberalization pressures within Czechoslovakia led to the forced resignation of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Antonin Novotny. Unable to garner Soviet backing, Novotny was reduced to the single remaining position of president, and Alexander Dubcek was installed as first secretary by the reform-minded forces within the communist party. Dubcek, raised and educated in the Soviet Union, was perceived to be a "reliable Communist" and therefore initially supported by Soviet leadership.¹ Soviets expected Dubcek to act as a moderating force to counteract the growing pressures for democratization and liberalization in Czechoslovakia. In spite of his direct reassurances to Brezhnev, Dubcek's actions over the next several months proved otherwise. He aggressively pursued reform policies that inherently raised the level of apprehension in the Soviet Union.

Dubcek implemented a series of policies aimed at producing a new pluralist system that he labeled "socialism with a human face."² The so-called "Prague Spring" reforms were intended to change both the basic complexion of domestic communism and the structure of external relationships with the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc

¹ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 219; and Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 16.

² Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision, Revised Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 12; and Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 223.

countries. Dubcek initiated sweeping personnel changes in critical positions replacing loyal communists with more liberal, reform-minded individuals in the military, police, party apparatus, government, and labor unions. These changes not only implied further democratization, but more importantly, directly impacted action channels for Soviet information and control.¹ In addition, Dubcek formally announced his intention to improve relations and extend economic and cultural contacts with Western Europe. Economic liberalization and stronger market linkage to Europe were seen as solutions to the economic woes Czechoslovakia had experienced since the early 1960s. Finally, Dubcek did little to check the newfound freedom of expression demonstrated across Czechoslovakia. In fact, he and party reformers had effectively abolished the communist practice of censorship by politically disabling the Central Publications Board in March 1968. Dubcek's broad, liberal democratic agenda became formal state policy when his "Action Program" was submitted by the Czechoslovak Presidium in March and approved by the Central Committee in April 1968.²

The Soviet ambassador's January assessment—delivered to the Soviet Politburo—that Dubcek was "unquestionably an honorable and faithful man and a staunch friend of the Soviet Union" gave way to a more sober evaluation at the Politburo meeting on March 15, 1968.³ Yuri Andropov, the Chairman of the KGB, cautioned that the events of the Prague Spring "are very reminiscent of what happened in Hungary."

¹ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*.

² Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 22.

³ Mark Kramer, "The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine," in *1968: The World Transformed*, ed., Carol Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122.

Brezhnev agreed adding that, "our earlier hopes for Dubcek have not borne out."⁴

Brezhnev then initiated what became the first of many personal telephone conversations with Dubcek to voice his concerns and cautions about the events in Czechoslovakia.

Soviet worries intensified throughout the rest of March when Novotny was ousted from his sole remaining position as president and Dubcek failed to confer with Soviet leadership on his replacement. The Soviet Politburo met the day Novotny resigned to discuss the developments in Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev expressed his concerns that events were "moving in an anticommunist direction."⁵ At this early stage there were already several Politburo members—including Andropov and Ukrainian party leader, Petro Shelest—who recommended that the Soviet Union prepare to take "extreme measures," including "military action."⁶ Polish and Eastern German leaders, Wladyslaw Gomułka and Walter Ulbricht, bolstered the hardline position at an emergency meeting held in Dresden on March 23 involving the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia.⁷ Dubcek and the rest of the Czechoslovak delegation—deceived about the purpose of the meeting—were directly confronted with demands to reign in the "counterrevolutionary" forces in the country.⁸ Brezhnev demonstrated a willingness to give the Czechoslovak leadership time to work through their domestic challenges, preferring "comradely persuasion" to military intervention.⁹ The Dresden

⁴ Quoted in Kramer, "The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine," 125.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 220.

⁸ *Stenographic Account of the Dresden Meeting, March 23, 1968 (Excerpts)*, Document No. 14, in *The Prague Spring 1968*, ed. Jaromir Navratil (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 67.

⁹ Ibid., 64; see introduction to the document.

conference proved to be the first in a long series of meetings, policy deliberations and subsequent attempts by the "Warsaw Five" (USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria) to persuade Dubcek to take action against the radical reformers.¹⁰ The policy positions of the primary actors reflected at the Dresden conference wavered little until mid-July when a greater consensus emerged favoring military intervention.

Brezhnev's "comradely persuasion" took the form of coercive diplomacy when the Soviets and other Warsaw Pact nations deployed thousands of troops to Czechoslovakia for "staff exercises" beginning on May 14, 1968.¹¹ The maneuvers were scheduled to end on June 30, but the Soviets dragged out the redeployment. By the second week of July, 16,000 Soviet troops still remained in Czechoslovakia and the majority of the other troops involved in the exercises were redeployed just outside of Czechoslovakia. In addition to the political and military pressure, the Soviet, East German and Polish presses also launched extensive propaganda campaigns against the counterrevolutionary forces.¹²

All of the "comradely persuasion" seemed to have paid dividends when the Soviets and Warsaw Pact nations met at the Bratislava conference on August 3. The Czechoslovak leadership perceived the resulting communiqué, the Bratislava Declaration, as agreement that their pursuit of a national interpretation of socialism was acceptable as long as the Czechoslovaks maintained their commitment to the Warsaw Pact.¹³ Most of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Alex P Schmid, *Soviet Military Interventions Since 1945* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 31.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 222.

the international community concluded that a compromise had been reached and military intervention averted. But less than three weeks later, those rosy perceptions turned into the stark reality of a massive multinational military intervention into Czechoslovakia. On the night of August 20, 175,000-200,000 troops of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria invaded Czechoslovakia across four different borders.¹⁴ The Czechoslovak leadership called on the people not to resist and ordered the Czechoslovak military to stand down. Swift military victory was achieved, but political gains were more difficult to come by. The Dubcek regime was removed from power and taken to Moscow. But when no worthy opposition leadership materialized, the Czechoslovak leaders were restored to power seven days later after signing an agreement to the "principles and obligations" of the Bratislava Declaration and accepting the stationing of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak soil.¹⁵

The final decision to intervene came at a Soviet Politburo meeting on August 17. The last time the Soviets chose to militarily intervene in a bloc country to squelch counterrevolutionary forces was in Hungary in 1956. The events of the Prague Spring, though, were "more gradual, legalistic, and tolerant" than those that led to intervention in Hungary.¹⁶ In addition, the reforms in Czechoslovakia were undertaken by the communist party, not against the party as in Hungary. And more importantly, Dubcek unswervingly swore allegiance to the Soviet Union and commitment to the Warsaw Pact, unlike Nagy, the leader of Hungary at the time.

¹⁴ Schmid, 31-32.

¹⁵ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 222.

¹⁶ Valenta, "Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and 'Normalization' in East-Central Europe," *Comparative Politics* 16 (January 1984), 130.

Given the radical differences in events, and the extended efforts over several months to find a political solution, what led Brezhnev and the rest of the Soviet Politburo to impose the Hungarian solution on August 17, 1968? Scholars have attributed the decision to intervene to various factors, including: (1) bureaucratic politics;¹⁷ (2) the impact of stress on crisis perceptions;¹⁸ (3) decision-maker risk-taking preferences;¹⁹ and (4) Soviet cognitive “beliefs about correct political behavior.”²⁰ Each of these explanations provides a reasonable glimpse into the realm of Soviet decision-making, but none provides the full picture of the decision to intervene. The integrated Allisonian framework better illuminates the full complexity of the decision process.

Rational Actor: Threat to the *Cordon Sanitaire*

From a realist-based, rational actor frame of reference, the Soviets ultimately interpreted Dubcek’s Prague Spring as a direct threat to vital strategic interests. The Soviets and other bloc leaders feared dissolution of the military and political unity of the communist bloc.²¹ The perceived threat was twofold. First, despite Dubcek’s assurances to the contrary, the Soviets were concerned that improved ties with the West would inevitably pull Czechoslovakia out of the Warsaw Pact, leaving a gaping hole in their western flank. Second, the Soviets feared the Czechoslovak reformist momentum would

¹⁷ Jiri Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*.

¹⁸ Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin*.

¹⁹ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*.

²⁰ Kieran Williams, “New Sources on Soviet Decision Making During the 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 3 (1996): 461; see also Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²¹ Navratil, xviii.

spillover to other bloc countries and even the Soviet Union—threatening the entire political/ideological foundation of the communist system.

The horrors of German incursions during World War II led the Soviets to construct a political, military, and ideological buffer zone between itself and the West. Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany provided especially critical links in the security *cordon sanitaire* that protected the Soviet Union's western flank from NATO.²² The rise in West German power was particularly alarming to the Soviets. A "nuclear-armed Germany became an obsession with the Kremlin's defense and foreign directors."²³ The Soviet Union could ill afford to lose Czechoslovakia—an integral piece of the strategic defense puzzle. A declaration of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee in Bucharest on July 4-5, 1966 left little doubt on the issue: "One of the main preconditions for the guarantee of European security is the immutability of the existing frontiers between European states, including the borders of the sovereign German Democratic Republic, Poland, and Czechoslovakia."²⁴ In the event of a NATO attack, the loss of Czechoslovakia would isolate Soviet forces in Hungary from those in East Germany and would have increased the vulnerability of western Russia, the Baltic republics, and the Ukraine.²⁵ In addition, the loss of loyal communists in key military positions raised Soviet doubts about Czechoslovakia's commitment to Soviet defense even if they remained in the alliance. There were thousands of Soviet troops permanently

²² Jiri Valenta, "Revolutionary Change," 128.

²³ Isaac Don Levine, *Intervention* (New York: David McKay, 1969), 13.

²⁴ Jonathan Haslam, "Soviet Policy Toward Western Europe Since World War II," in *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*, eds., Breslauer, George W. and Philip E. Tetlock (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 486.

²⁵ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 224.

stationed in neighboring bloc countries ensuring military allegiance, but not in Czechoslovakia. This lack of direct military control made the Soviets extremely nervous when the action channels for indirect control came under attack.

Recently released top secret documentation also indicates that the Soviets had garnered Czechoslovak approval to station nuclear weapons under direct Soviet control in three different locations in the country—Bela pod Bezdezem, Bilina and Misov.²⁶ A 1965 “Treaty Between the Governments of the USSR and CSSR on Measures to Increase the Combat Readiness of Missile Forces” outlined the implementation details—preparations that had been underway but not yet completed at the time of the Prague Spring.²⁷ The nuclear plan for Czechoslovakia had always been problematic for the Soviets because there were no Soviet troops permanently stationed in-country—like Poland, East Germany and Hungary—to assure Soviet nuclear security. The Soviets were largely dependent upon Czechoslovak loyalty and commitment, but with the advent of the Prague Spring those qualities became suspect. The Prague Spring, therefore, not only threatened Soviet conventional defense strategy, but potentially undercut Soviet plans for an Eastern European nuclear umbrella.

Soviet security concerns crystallized following release of the Czechoslovak Action Program and the non-government endorsed, but popular, “Two Thousand Words” Manifesto. Although the Action Program stated that Czechoslovak foreign policy “revolves around alliance and cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist

²⁶ Mark Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: New Interpretations,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 3 (Fall 1993): 8-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

states," it also ominously (from the Soviet perspective) called for the pursuit of "a policy of peaceful coexistence vis-à-vis the advanced capitalist countries." More specifically, the Action Program added: "Our geographical position, as well as the needs and capacities of an industrialized country, compel us to pursue a more active European policy aimed at the promotion of mutually advantageous relations with all states and with international organizations, and aimed at safeguarding the collective security of the European continent."²⁸ Continental European collective security certainly wasn't in the strategic plans of the Soviet Union. The Soviet and other bloc leaders were disturbed by the inherent contradictions of the Action Program and looked for other evidence to indicate which way Czechoslovakia was headed.

The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto, published in several Czechoslovak newspapers on June 27, came to symbolize the Prague Spring and provided just the evidence that the Warsaw Five feared. Signed by nearly seventy "prominent individuals" representing a broad cross-section of Czechoslovak society, the "Two Thousand Words" strongly endorsed the Czechoslovak reforms and cautioned against any regression.²⁹ The manifesto advocated vigorous grass-roots efforts to accelerate reforms. The document caught Dubcek off-guard and infuriated Soviet leaders. Dubcek's less than aggressive official condemnation of the manifesto failed to squelch Soviet concerns. For the Soviet leaders, "the manifesto represented a platform for counterrevolution"—a

²⁸ *The CPCz CC Action Program, April 1968 (Excerpts)*, Document No. 19, Navratil, 92-95.

²⁹ *The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto, June 27, 1968*, Document No. 44, Navratil, 177-181.

grass-roots platform that threatened to infect other communist societies and undermine bloc governments.³⁰

In fact, evidence of ideological spillover was mounting, presenting the Soviets with not just the potential of a single bloc defection, but more importantly, a threat to the viability of the entire communist system. As early as March, riots broke out in Poland where students and intellectuals protested repressive government policies and demanded a "Polish Dubcek."³¹ Political and ideological spillover threatened other bloc countries as well, but the major finding revealed in recently released archival documents is the significance of the spillover threat to the Soviet Union itself. Soviet scholar Mark Kramer notes, "It is now clear that the degree of ferment in the Soviet Union connected with the events in Czechoslovakia was much greater than previously assumed."³² A Soviet dissident recalled, "socialism with a human face" gained widespread sympathy—especially within Moscow's intellectual circles—and led to a "sort of Prague Spring in miniature."³³ Spillover effects were reported in the Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, and the three Baltic republics.³⁴

Three influential members of the Soviet Politburo were intimately familiar with the spillover issues. Petro Shelest, First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party,

³⁰ Navratil, 183.

³¹ See Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 26; and Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 223.

³² Mark Kramer, "Moldava, Romania, and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 326.

³³ Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 186.

³⁴ See "'Spill-Over' from the Prague Spring—A KGB Report," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 4 (Fall 1994): 66-67; and Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet -Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part I): New Evidence from the Diary of Petro Shelest," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 10 (March 1998): 234-247; Mark Kramer, "Soviet Moldavia and the 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis: A Report on the Political 'Spill-Over,'" *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998): 263; and Kramer, "Moldava, Romania, and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," 326-333.

was a full member of the Politburo and ardent advocate for military intervention—largely based on his perception of the spillover threat to the Ukraine and the rest of the communist bloc. Shelest repeatedly warned Brezhnev and the Politburo that the “activity of anti-socialist, opportunist, and anarchist elements” in Czechoslovakia were “causing unsavory phenomena here in Ukraine as well.”³⁵ Andropov, a non-voting member of the Politburo and another early advocate for military intervention, was also convinced—based on reports of student unrest gleaned from informants—that there was a real threat of domestic spillover.³⁶ Finally, “all materials about a possible spillover from Czechoslovakia were closely reviewed by Mikhail Suslov, one of the most powerful members of the CPSU Politburo.”³⁷

As early as April at a hastily called Central Committee plenum, Soviet leadership already concluded that Dubcek’s actions presented an ideological challenge to the foundation of the socialist system, a threat to their regional hegemony, and a divisive force within the communist bloc.³⁸ Soviet leaders decided that they, therefore, had a legitimate right to intervene in Czechoslovak affairs to protect the internal and external security of the Soviet bloc.³⁹ The committee declared: “We will not give up Czechoslovakia.”⁴⁰ The realist-based, rational decision to intervene had, for all practical purposes, been made “allowing the search for alternatives to begin in earnest.”⁴¹

³⁵ Mark Kramer, “Ukraine and the Soviet -Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968,” 234-35.

³⁶ See “‘Spill-Over’ from the Prague Spring—A KGB Report,” 66-67.

³⁷ Mark Kramer, “Soviet Moldavia and the 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis,” 263.

³⁸ See Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*; and Dawisha, *The Kremlin*.

³⁹ Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 60.

⁴⁰ Navratil, 1998, p. xxix.

⁴¹ Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 61.

The military alternative presented low to moderate risk in terms of hard-core realist power calculations.⁴² Neither Dubcek nor the United States demonstrated a willingness to fight over Czechoslovakia. Dubcek refused to ready his forces for defense against a Soviet invasion despite recommendations from key military officials, and the U.S. was caught up in its own domestic and international crises. At home, racial strife and presidential politics busied U.S. policymakers. Increased military engagement in Vietnam and the lack of response to the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 led the Politburo to conclude that the U.S. would stay removed from the intervention. "This position was implied in the public statements of secretary of state, Dean Rusk in 1968 and by President Johnson's strong interest in the early start of SALT negotiations."⁴³

The rational actor level of analysis clearly highlights the undeniable security concerns of the Soviet Union and other bloc countries and the cost-benefit power calculations, but provides little insight into why Brezhnev pursued a diplomatic solution for the better part of six months then chose to impose the Hungarian solution on August 17. Organizational behavior and political bargaining shaped by analogical reasoning and domestic political pressures best explain the six-month policy formulation/deliberation process that ultimately led to military intervention. Perceptions of security threats were partially shaped throughout the policy process by organizational control of information and manipulation of historical analogies. The dominant analogies were Poland and Hungary in 1956. The policy formulation and deliberation process could be

⁴² See Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, Chapter 6. Vertzberger builds his entire book around the notion of risk and clearly classifies the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia as a low to moderate risk military intervention.

⁴³ Jiri Valenta, "Revolutionary Change," 138.

characterized as a battle over these two historical analogies. Poland and Hungary presented the last major challenges to the Soviet Union's regional hegemony and provided distinctly different lessons for decision-makers.

Poland, 1956

The Polish people, seeking to capitalize on the door opened by Khrushchev's "secret" call for anti-Stalinist reforms and the recent death of their long-time communist party leader, Boleslaw Bierut,⁴⁴ launched a series of events starting in June 1956 that "provoked unease in Moscow about growing instability and rebellion."⁴⁵ The Poznan riots on June 28-29 started as general strike but quickly grew into a mass demonstration calling for "an end to communist dictatorship in Poland," "free elections," and the "removal of Soviet occupation forces."⁴⁶ Soviet leaders were shocked and concerned—like they were in Czechoslovakia in 1968—that continued "subversive activities" would spillover into the rest of the Soviet bloc "destroying [the socialist countries] one by one."⁴⁷

Wladyslaw Gomulka, a prominent victim of the Stalinist purges, was elected—against the vociferous demands of Khrushchev—first secretary by the Polish United Worker's Party Central Committee on October 20, 1956.⁴⁸ Gomulka dropped several hard-line Soviet loyalists from the Polish Politburo, pushed for the removal of Soviet military officers from the Polish army, and demanded that the Soviet Union not interfere

⁴⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 209.

⁴⁵ Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings." *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 168.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See Gaddis, 209; and Kramer, "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 169.

in Poland's internal affairs. Much like Czechoslovakia, the Soviets accused the Poles of getting rid of "old, trustworthy revolutionaries who are loyal to the cause of socialism" and of "turning toward the West against the Soviet Union."⁴⁹

The initial Soviet actions mirrored the early stages of the Czechoslovak crisis. The Soviets responded with coercive diplomacy, moving in-country Soviet troops towards Warsaw (similar to the military exercises in and around Czechoslovakia). Khrushchev authorized *Pravda* to launch a media campaign, accusing the Polish of trying to "undermine socialism" and initiated a meeting with the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, East Germany, and Bulgaria to discuss policy options (like the Warsaw Five deliberations in the case of Czechoslovakia).

The Polish people and authorities stood firm. Immense pro-Gomulka rallies took place between October 22 and 24, and Gomulka threatened to arm workers to defend against Soviet military intervention. At the Presidium meeting on October 24, Khrushchev told the East European leaders that, "Finding a reason for an armed conflict now would be very easy, but finding a way to put an end to such a conflict later on would be very hard."⁵⁰ The Soviets were concerned that the Polish military would likely put up stiff resistance in the event of military intervention. As such, Khrushchev was looking for a diplomatic way out. Khrushchev granted Gomulka greater leeway in pursuing a Polish "road to socialism" in return for reassurances that Poland would remain a loyal ally and member of the Warsaw Pact. Gomulka subsequently demonstrated a more

⁴⁹ Kramer, "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 170.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 172.

conciliatory line in public speeches, calling for stronger political and military ties with the Soviet Union and condemning those advocating withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Gomulka continued to remove some loyal Soviet allies from key positions, but his assurances that Poland would stay in the Warsaw Pact and that Soviet troops could remain in Poland, backed by his public pronouncements provided Khrushchev enough comfort not to intervene. Khrushchev later commented on Gomulka: "Here was a man who had come to power on the crest of an anti-Soviet wave, yet who could now speak forcefully about the need to preserve Poland's friendly relations with Soviet Russia and with the Soviet Communist Party."⁵¹

Hungary, 1956

Khrushchev's decision not to militarily intervene in Poland may have been influenced as much by the emerging crisis in Hungary as the dissipation of conflict in Poland.⁵² The reform activities in Poland had spilled-over to Hungary. Hungarian reformers, entrenched in their own leadership scuffles, became more emboldened by the activities in Poland. Destabilizing events culminated in late October just when the Soviet Presidium met to decide the fate of Poland. The situation in Hungary reached the boiling point on October 23 when a massive student-led demonstration in Budapest careened out of control because Hungarian state security forces fired on unarmed protestors. The demonstrator backlash "quickly overwhelmed the Hungarian police and security forces

⁵¹ Quoted in Gaddis, 210.

⁵² Mark Kramer concluded that, "Had the crisis in Hungary not intervened on 23 October, Soviet leaders might well have been inclined to take a firmer stand." In "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 173.

and caused widespread panic and near-paralysis among senior Hungarian officials.”⁵³

Upon receiving news of the situation, Khrushchev urged Erno Gero, the recently elected (under Soviet encouragement) Hungarian first secretary and Soviet ally, to send a written request for Soviet military aid.⁵⁴ That aid followed on October 24. Khrushchev authorized the military to “redeploy Soviet units into Budapest to assist Hungarian troops and state security forces in the restoration of public order.”⁵⁵

The presence of Soviet troops stirred greater anti-Soviet sentiment, worsened the unrest, and led—with Soviet agreement—to the fall of Gero and the ascendancy of Imre Nagy and Janos Kadar. Shifting his allegiance to the side of the reformers, Nagy, the new Hungarian party leader, negotiated the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Shortly after the Soviets began to leave Budapest, Nagy formed a coalition government, advocated a return to a multiparty system with free elections, purged the military of Soviet loyalists and boldly announced that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact.⁵⁶ As Gaddis so astutely observed: “Khrushchev’s Polish settlement...produced a Hungarian debacle.”⁵⁷ The Soviet Presidium concluded that there was “no comparison with Poland” and that Nagy “is in fact turning against us.”⁵⁸ The threat Hungary posed to Soviet strategic interests coupled with domestic political concerns forced the Soviets to quickly reverse course and launch a full-scale military invasion on November 4, 1956. Khrushchev noted

⁵³ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁴ This technique of asking for an official request for Soviet military aid from internal loyalists is repeated in the Czechoslovak crisis. See Condoleezza Rice and Michael Fry, “The Hungarian Crisis of 1956: The Soviet Decision.” In *Superpowers and Revolution*, ed., Jonathan R. Adelman (New York: Praeger, 1986), 181-199.

⁵⁵ Mark Kramer, “1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 184.

⁵⁶ See Rice and Fry, 184; and Gaddis, 210.

⁵⁷ Gaddis, 210

⁵⁸ Quoted in Mark Kramer, “1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 174.

that the Soviet Union “cannot by any means sit by idly” while the counterrevolutionary forces hang communists, appeal to the UN, and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. If they did, “the capitalists will think that they are either weak or stupid, which can only lead to one thing. The capitalists will push their positions to the Soviet borders.”⁵⁹

Khrushchev also worried that inside the Soviet Union many critics would say that “while Stalin ruled, everybody shut up and there were no disturbances of any kind.” But now that Khrushchev was in power, “we have bloodshed and the breaking away of Hungary.”⁶⁰ Consequently, Soviet forces crushed the resistance at the cost of 22,000 Hungarian and 2,300 Soviet casualties. Nagy was removed from power and later executed. Kadar—who had been surreptitiously flown to Moscow to take part in the Presidium meetings of November 2 and 3—was installed as a willing, yet somewhat reluctant, pro-Soviet leader.

Gomulka, when coerced, softened the Polish counterrevolutionary rhetoric and promised to remain loyal to the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact, but Nagy had stood firm. Nagy’s defiance, coupled with Hungary’s lesser military threat, led the Soviets to enact the military solution that Poland was spared. In fact, Poland may have been spared partially because Hungary wasn’t. Soviet leadership was hit with the daunting Hungarian challenge at the point where it was attempting to reconcile the Polish problem. It is hard to imagine that the Soviets would have been willing to advance militarily on both countries nearly simultaneously.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jeno Gyorkei and Miklos Horvath, eds., *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

Condoleeza Rice and Michael Fry contend that the Politburo had, in 1956, established both a *process* and a *model* of how to handle counterrevolutionary, nationalist movements in bloc states.⁶¹ The process centered on consultation with other bloc members, justification based on the identification of counterrevolutionary forces, and legitimization in the form of an invitation from within the country for military aid. Consultation with bloc members “increased bloc solidarity, masked Soviet unilateral behavior, and provided a justification for history.”⁶² The model established by the Hungarian precedent was direct, massive and decisive military intervention. The concept of “limited sovereignty” was molded in Hungary, not Czechoslovakia—where it later became formalized in the Brezhnev Doctrine.⁶³

In political terms, though, the events of the Prague Spring more closely represented those of Poland than Hungary in 1956. Why then did the Soviets impose the Hungarian solution? The realist lens hints at the fact that Czechoslovakia didn’t pose the military challenge of Poland, but the full answer is more complex. Strategic calculations of security threats and military risks are ultimately affected by perceptions. In the case of Czechoslovakia, organizational processes—particularly the control of information—and personal experience and persuasion shaped those perceptions in the mold of Hungary, 1956.

⁶¹ Rice and Fry, 196.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Organizational Processes: A Hungarian Reproduction

KGB

Recently released evidence clearly demonstrates that the KGB exercised “undue influence during the 1968 crisis.”⁶⁴ They were one of the “earliest and most adamant proponents of military intervention in Czechoslovakia.”⁶⁵ The KGB controlled and manipulated intelligence, fabricated evidence, ignited internal provocations, and propagandized—all to purposely paint an assessment of the Prague Spring alarming enough to warrant military intervention. The KGB was motivated by both national interests—perceived NATO threats to a Soviet bloc weakened by actions in Czechoslovakia—and, more substantively, organizational interests—threats to their basic organizational power and viability.

The “ferment in Czechoslovakia had caused problems for virtually every department and branch” of the KGB.⁶⁶ The Dubcek regime began to purge the Czechoslovak state security agency of Soviet loyalists and KGB operatives, steadily diminishing Soviet influence over the Czechoslovak security apparatus. If the Prague Spring were allowed to run its course, KGB action channels within Czechoslovakia would have been severely curtailed, if not fully eliminated. In addition, Czechoslovak leaders exposed domestic KGB propaganda efforts and security abuses raising KGB fears that spillover effects may ultimately lead to increased scrutiny on the home front over

⁶⁴ Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” 6; see also Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), Chapter 12; and Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), Chapter 15.

⁶⁵ Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

similar actions and abuses in the Soviet Union. These perceived threats led the KGB to misinform the Soviet leadership on the true nature of the Prague Spring.

The concerns over events in Czechoslovakia led to the suspension of recent rules forbidding KGB espionage in bloc countries. The KGB quickly instituted phone taps and other signals intelligence mechanisms, gathered personnel files on all the Czechoslovak state security officers, sent about thirty spies from the West to Czechoslovakia posing as Western tourists, and established communications channels with Soviet loyalists within the Czechoslovak government.⁶⁷ In spite of the varied means for gathering intelligence, objective intelligence analysis was undermined by an organizational bias that saw a Western hand behind all Czechoslovak reform activities.

Accurate intelligence assessments of internal Czechoslovak and external NATO actions were suppressed, never reaching the Soviet leadership. A former KGB station chief in Washington, D.C. at the time, Oleg Kalugin, commented: "I reported from Washington that the CIA was not involved in the development of the Prague Spring. But my attempt at an even-handed report simply did not fit in with the KGB's concept of the way events were shaping up in Czechoslovakia, and therefore never got beyond the KGB. My information was wasted."⁶⁸ Kalugin learned upon his return to the Soviet Union, that the KGB had ordered that his reports "not be shown to anyone, and destroyed."⁶⁹ Nearly all the information—real or fabricated—that reached the top decision-making levels of the Politburo was skewed to favor military intervention.

⁶⁷ Andrew and Gordievsky, 483.

⁶⁸ Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," 6.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Andrew and Gordievsky, 484.

The linchpin in the KGB effort to control information and influence the intervention decision process was Yuri Andropov. Andropov became chairman of the KGB in 1967 and was only the second person in that position to also hold a seat on the Politburo. Although a non-voting member, Andropov's position provided him direct access to the policy deliberations. Andropov leveraged his control over critical information to paint the Prague Spring in the image of Hungary, 1956. He was uniquely suited for the task. Andropov had been the Soviet ambassador in Budapest in 1956 and played a significant role in the Hungarian intervention. He was one of the earliest (April, 1956) to inform the Soviet leadership about the "demagoguery and provocations" of Hungarian "right-wing opportunists."⁷⁰ Later, Andropov telephoned Khrushchev to inform the Soviet leadership that the situation in Budapest was "extraordinarily dangerous" and to request Soviet military intervention.⁷¹ Other Soviet observers sent to Budapest reported less ominous findings, leading Khrushchev to conclude that, "the situation is not so terrible as has been painted by the Hungarian comrades and the Soviet ambassador. There is more or less calm in Budapest."⁷² But in the end, Andropov's insistence that the counterrevolution had reached a critical stage, backed by support within the military and an ally within Hungary—Erno Gero—helped convince an initially reluctant Khrushchev to intervene.⁷³ Andropov's interventionist impulse was highlighted by the fact that he instructed the military to initiate the intervention before receiving the

⁷⁰ Kramer, "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 176.

⁷¹ Quoted in Gyorki and Horvath, 11.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷³ Andrew and Mitrokhin, 251.

official go-ahead from above. The military refused to comply with the ambassador's orders.⁷⁴

Khrushchev's son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, though supportive of Andropov's role in the Hungarian intervention, nonetheless concluded that it "left a brutal mark on his outlook to eastern Europe."⁷⁵ Andropov's experience in Hungary structured his perception of the Prague Spring and provided a model for action. Like Hungary in 1956, the KGB strategy for Czechoslovakia was based on a "mixture of deception and military might."⁷⁶ KGB "illegals" disguised as Western tourists, journalists, business people, and students were deployed to Czechoslovakia for both "intelligence collection and active measures."⁷⁷ So-called PROGRESS operatives infiltrated reformists in an attempt to gather intelligence and provoke extreme activities that would provide "evidence" for the military interventionists. Only a "small circle of senior officers" knew of these PROGRESS activities.⁷⁸ Andropov also secretly established an undeclared KGB residence in Prague and strengthened open KGB presence in an effort to identify "reliable, pro-Soviet members" of the Czechoslovak communist party that could form a post-invasion provisional government.⁷⁹

In addition, the KGB illegals were tasked with active measures—codenamed KHODOKI ("go-betweens")—to fabricate evidence of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy. The most successful operation was the planting of a secret cache of

⁷⁴ Gyorkei and Horvath, 14.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Andrew and Gordievsky, 481.

⁷⁶ Andrew and Mitrokhin, 251.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 252.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

American weapons near the West German border. On July 19 *Pravda* reported the discovery of these weapons as evidence of a Western hand in the activities of the Prague Spring.⁸⁰ The Soviet Politburo met on the same day that the *Pravda* article was released to deliberate on Czechoslovakia. Not surprisingly, Andropov—who had fabricated the story—“emerged as the chief spokesman of those who wanted extreme measures immediately.”⁸¹

KGB manipulation of information, fabrication of evidence, and covert operations successfully exaggerated the threat of a Czechoslovak counterrevolution and painted the Prague Spring with the broad-brush strokes of Hungary, 1956. Andropov’s direct access to the Politburo ensured that his contrived reproduction was prominently displayed before the central decision-makers. Consequently, the organizational manipulation of vital information directly influenced executive threat perceptions and power dynamics.

Military

Next to the KGB, the Soviet military was the staunchest organizational advocate of military intervention in Czechoslovakia.⁸² The Ministry of Defense exerted great pressure on Soviet decision-makers to pursue a military solution, starting with the deployment of Soviet troops on the Czechoslovak border.⁸³ After repeated failed attempts to negotiate a settlement, Soviet leaders conceded to military wishes and authorized a large-scale joint military “exercise” that would mobilize Warsaw Pact troops

⁸⁰ Ibid., 255.

⁸¹ Ibid., 256.

⁸² Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 184.

⁸³ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 247.

around Czechoslovakia as a contingency for military intervention. These exercises served several purposes. First, they provided a visible threat to Dubcek. Second, the deployment established lines of communication and provided training needed to build confidence in the military option. Third, joint exercises allowed the bloc military leadership to assess the strength and resilience of Czechoslovak forces and the political will of the people. And finally, command and control capability was established internal to Czechoslovakia that would prove to be critical in the event of an invasion.⁸⁴

The military, much like the KGB, was driven by both organizational and strategic interests; in fact, the two were intertwined. The Prague Spring threatened Soviet action channels within the Czechoslovak military and called into question the basic loyalty of Czechoslovak forces. Soviet military suspicions grew with the release of the so-called "Gottwald Memorandum" prepared by thirty scholars on the staff of the Klement Gottwald Military Political Academy and a later press conference given by General Vaclav Prchlik, the Czechoslovak army's chief political officer. The memorandum, published in a Prague newspaper in July, advocated a military doctrine built upon both state and bloc interests; and state interests demanded a reduction in nuclear risk. The military scholars recommended that that reduction come through a "nuclear non-proliferation treaty" and "the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe."⁸⁵

General Prchlik added fuel to the fire by openly criticizing Soviet hegemony in the

⁸⁴ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*.

⁸⁵ *Memorandum by Thirty Associates of the Military Political Academy and Military Technical Academy for the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee*, 4 June 1968, Document No. 6 in Mastny, Vojtech, "'We Are in a Bind': Polish and Czechoslovak Attempts at Reforming the Warsaw Pact, 1956-1969," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998): 247.

Warsaw Pact, condemning the deployment of bloc troops on Czechoslovak territory, and calling for broad changes in the Warsaw Pact alliance—changes that would have ultimately affected Soviet nuclear weapons deployment.⁸⁶

During the 1960s the Soviet military built its war plans—targeted against NATO—upon the foundation of coalition warfare, linking the forces and destinies of the Eastern bloc nations with those of the Soviet Union. That approach, as outlined in classified Soviet military documents of the mid-1960s, envisioned rapid, offensive operations by coalition forces using conventional and nuclear capabilities: “The defense strategy of the *socialist countries* must focus on seizing the most important regions and lines, and on *absolutely preventing an incursion by the adversary’s forces into the territory of the socialist countries*. The strategy will be based on *nuclear strikes* in conjunction with the use of *conventional firepower* and mobile operations by *combined forces*, and also on the wide-scale use of obstruction (emphasis added).”⁸⁷

This excerpt from a Top Secret report points to several key factors that help illuminate the military interest in the activities of the Prague Spring. First, the Soviet plans to address the NATO threat were inextricably intertwined with the Eastern bloc “socialist countries.” Second, based on memories of World War II, much emphasis was placed on “preventing an incursion...into the territory of the socialist countries,” and the territory of Czechoslovakia was considered a critical link in the *cordon sanitaire*. And finally, the Soviets planned to use “combined forces” with conventional and nuclear

⁸⁶ Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” 9.

⁸⁷ Excerpt from Top Secret report, no. 24762s, from Col.-General P. Ivashutin, chief of the Soviet General Staff’s Main Intelligence Directorate, to Marshal M. V. Zakharov, head of the General Staff Military Academy, August 28, 1964; quoted in Kramer, “The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” 113.

capabilities. The Soviet approach demanded Soviet control over these lethal forces. Only through direct Soviet military control of the forces and especially the nuclear weapons, could the Soviet leadership maintain confidence. The Soviets had this control relationship firmly established in Poland and Hungary—with nuclear arsenals and thousands of Soviet troops stationed in each country—but lacked this capability in Czechoslovakia. This explains why the loss of direct action channels into the Czechoslovak military was perceived as a threat to the grand Soviet military strategy. In addition, the recently agreed to secret treaty to station nuclear forces on Czechoslovak soil heightened Soviet military hopes for a permanent military presence and likewise heightened their apprehension when it looked like “socialism with a human face” may void that plan.

Nuclear storage facilities were already under construction at Bela pod Bezdezem, Bilina and Misov, and due to be completed in 1969. Soviet military hardliners concluded that the risks of deploying nuclear warheads to those Czechoslovak facilities would be too great unless the sites were converted into larger Soviet military bases.⁸⁸ That conversion appears to be the primary motivation of the military leadership during the Prague Spring. The location of specific Soviet troop movements during the multinational “exercises” indicates that protection and control of those three future nuclear sites was a major military objective.⁸⁹ As Mark Kramer concluded: “Well before the

⁸⁸ Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” 10.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

invasion...Soviet military officers were no longer willing to accept anything less than the deployment of a 'Central Group of Soviet Forces' on Czechoslovak soil."⁹⁰

Soviet military leaders, like the KGB, demonstrated persistent interventionist impulses and also adopted the Hungarian analogy to bolster their stance. A Hungarian military report about the exercises in Czechoslovakia sent back to the Hungarian Politburo is particularly telling about Soviet military behavior.⁹¹ In that report, Major-General Istvan Olah, Deputy Minister of Defense, and Major-General Ferenc Szucs, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, described the tension created between Soviet military leaders and Czechoslovak leaders. They reported that the continued stonewalling by the Soviets over the exercise termination date "triggered conflicts and heated discussions" that "increased the mistrust that was already present at the outset."⁹² The Hungarian officers noted that the Soviet military used the Hungarian analogy to make a case for counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia: "Insinuations were made that the presence of Soviet units and military organs had been a problem in the past for Imre Nagy, though not for Cde. Kadar."⁹³ Generals Olah and Szucs flatly disagreed with the Soviet analogy: "In our opinion, there is no counterrevolutionary situation in the country."⁹⁴ Hungarian officers who lived through the events of 1956 should be uniquely suited to assess the similarity of the Prague Spring. The generals concluded their report in bold fashion by recommending that the Hungarian Politburo inform the Soviet leadership that

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Report on the Sumava Exercises by Generals I. Olah and F. Szucs of the Hungarian People's Army to the HSWP Politburo, July 5, 1968*, Document No. 47, Navratil, 199-201.

⁹² Ibid., 201

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

“unprofessional, crude, and insulting behavior of certain Soviet military commanders is objectively detrimental to the authority and reputation of the Soviet Union and to the unity of the Warsaw Pact”⁹⁵—a recommendation that likely died in the halls of the Hungarian Politburo.

Perceived organizational threats at the Soviet military level translated directly into perceived national security threats at the Politburo level. This translation was both natural and forced—forced through the firm advocacy of the military for direct military intervention. Lacking the direct access to the Politburo of Yuri Andropov, the military had another channel—the Defense Council—through which they could influence the policy deliberations. Brezhnev, who had based his political power on an intimate relationship with the military leadership, chaired the Defense Council, a joint Politburo-military leadership committee.⁹⁶ Marshal Grechko, the minister for defense, was both a council member and close ally of Brezhnev’s. Grechko leveraged his position and relationship to ensure that the secretary general was fully apprised of the military viewpoint.

In addition to direct persuasion, the military deployment of thousands of Warsaw Pact troops in and around Czechoslovakia presented the Soviet leadership with a challenging path dependency that ultimately favored military intervention. The deployed troops could not be logistically supported indefinitely, they created economic strains at

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 247.

home because men were pulled away from harvesting duties,⁹⁷ and their withdrawal would signal weakness on the part of Soviet leadership encouraging more political “spillover.” The Soviet military, confident in their leverage over the deliberation process, “actually proceeded with preparations for an invasion anticipating that the Kremlin, faced with unfolding developments, would be compelled to give consent.”⁹⁸

From an organizational standpoint, military intervention not only dealt with the specific challenges presented by the Prague Spring, but also provided a legitimized mechanism for deployment of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak soil. Once there, establishing permanent presence would be a *fait accompli*, and that is exactly the way the intervention played out. Soviet troops numbering 75,000-85,000 remained in Czechoslovakia until July 1991.⁹⁹

The KGB and Soviet military manipulated information and presented the Politburo with significant organizational constraints, but did not fully determine the policy outcome. Brezhnev held the hardliners at bay for several months while attempting to achieve a diplomatic solution. What then accounted for the decision to intervene on August 17, 1968? Certainly, realist concerns over the strategic importance of Czechoslovakia, distorted intelligence assessments, and military path dependencies all pointed towards intervention; but in the end, the interplay of key individuals with diverse interests and perceptions—perceptions driven largely by historical analogies—explain the ultimate intervention decision.

⁹⁷ General Semyon Zolotov's *Restrospective Account of the Sumava Military Exercises*, Document No. 48, Navratil, 205.

⁹⁸ Navratil, 312.

⁹⁹ Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” 8.

Bureaucratic Politics: The Battle of Analogies

Persistent pro-intervention persuasion, information control, and analogical reasoning marked the Soviet policy deliberation process. Contrary to some commonly held notions of small, rigid Soviet decision-making groups, the deliberations over Czechoslovakia involved a broad base of Soviet Politburo, bloc, and organizational leaders, but the Secretary General, Leonid Brezhnev, reigned supreme throughout the process. All of the critical actors in the decision process were intimately involved with the events in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and those experiences provided both perceptual lenses and models for action...or inaction. The two historical analogies represented the two dominant policy positions—peaceful diplomatic measures or military intervention. The two analogies also provided convenient mechanisms for policy persuasion. The more the Prague Spring could be made to look like Poland or Hungary, the stronger the case for a preferred policy option.

At the Dresden meeting on March 23, 1968, the stage was set for an extended policy battle over these two historical analogies. While Yuri Andropov had characterized the events in Czechoslovakia as “very reminiscent of what happened in Hungary”¹⁰⁰ as early as the Soviet Politburo meeting on March 15th, it was Wladyslaw Gomulka that specifically advocated to all the parties at the Dresden meeting to interpret the events in Czechoslovakia through the experiences of 1956: “Why shouldn’t we draw conclusions

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Kramer, “The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” 125.

from the experience which we acquired in 1956 in Poland? Why not draw conclusions from what happened in Hungary? That all began in a similar way, comrades.”¹⁰¹

Interestingly, Gomulka—the former Polish reformist who had survived the threats of Soviet intervention in 1956—vehemently attacked Dubcek and the events of the Prague Spring, while Janos Kadar—the Hungarian leader brought to power through Soviet military intervention—cautioned against premature action. Gomulka focused on the underlying counterrevolutionary similarities of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, dismissing arguments that the outward events differed. At the Dresden meeting, he argued that like the events of 1956, “the flag of the defense of culture and the defense of freedom...mask the enemy, the counterrevolution...”¹⁰² Kadar responded to Gomulka’s accusation by agreeing to his use of analogical reasoning, but disagreeing with his assessment: “Comrade Gomulka already touched upon the fact, and I agree with him, that there are certain historical experiences, for example direct ones, which relate above all to Hungary and Poland, where a few years ago similar events already took place...this is a shared experience which we all need to take advantage of.” But Kadar cautioned that even in Politburo discussions, there “are great differences” of interpretation. Kadar’s interpretation of the Czechoslovak events was that they are “extremely similar to the prologue of the Hungarian counterrevolution at a time when it had not yet become a counterrevolution.” Kadar was more conciliatory, advocating diplomatic measures with Dubcek.

¹⁰¹ *Stenographic Account of the Dresden Meeting, March 23, 1968(Excerpts)*, Document No. 14, Navratil, 67.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

The bargaining positions established early in the crisis remained fairly consistent until July. Soviet and bloc leaders that felt most threatened by potential spillover effects cemented the hard-line interventionist camp and most frequently evoked the Hungarian analogy. These included Ulbricht of East Germany, Zhivkov of Bulgaria, Gomulka of Poland, and Shelest of the Ukraine. Ulbricht and Zhivkov's interventionist impulses mirrored similar stances that the two took during the Hungarian crisis in 1956.¹⁰³ Fellow bloc leader, Gomulka, had over time "gradually abandoned the reformist mantle and reverted to an orthodox communist approach."¹⁰⁴ In addition to the bloc leaders, Petro Shelest of the Ukraine shared in both their spillover concerns and fervor for military action. Shelest was first to broach the case for military intervention at a March 21 Politburo meeting. He declared that the "fate of the whole socialist camp" was at risk and that "military measures" would be necessary.¹⁰⁵ Shelest found an immediate ally in Yuri Andropov who called on the Soviet Politburo to prepare for military intervention.¹⁰⁶ The bloc leaders weighed in two days later at the Dresden meeting with Gomulka and Ulbricht providing the fiercest attacks on Dubcek.

The Soviet military and KGB bolstered the interventionist camp by providing direct advocacy and controlling critical information as discussed earlier. Andropov was so successful in convincing the Soviet leadership of Western and Hungarian-like counterrevolutionary influence in the Prague Spring that until his death in 1989, Andrei

¹⁰³ See Kramer, "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 1998.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Kramer, "The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine," 126; and Andrew and Mitrokhin, 251.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Gromyko continued to insist that: "Of course outside help was also given to the enemies of the new Czechoslovakia in much the same way as happened in Hungary in 1956."¹⁰⁷

The KGB also furthered the interventionist cause by exaggerating the strength of internal Dubcek opposition. Slovak Communist Party leader, Vasil Bil'ak, led that opposition.

Vasil Bil'ak and his small contingent of Czechoslovak hardliners¹⁰⁸ played a critical role in the policy deliberations by seemingly confirming the alarmist assessments of Andropov, providing assurances of a stalwart opposition force, and ultimately requesting Soviet intervention—following the model of Erno Gero in the Hungarian crisis. On May 6, Brezhnev and the Soviet Politburo authorized Shelest to act as a liaison with the "healthy forces" in Czechoslovakia headed by the Vasil Bil'ak.¹⁰⁹ Shelest's initial meeting with Bil'ak on 24-25 May marked a turning point in the crisis. Shelest's report to Brezhnev on his conversation with Bil'ak—detailing Bil'ak's pessimistic assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia—changed the mood of the entire Politburo. They no longer trusted Dubcek as a partner in the process. Bil'ak had told Shelest: "To cool off the hotheads, it's urgently necessary that you conduct maneuvers of your troops on the territory of Czechoslovakia. Once Russian soldiers turn up, all of these political rats go hide in their burrows."¹¹⁰ Petro Shelest's diary provides an interesting glimpse into the events leading to the official "letter of invitation" from Czechoslovak insiders.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew and Gordievsky, 485.

¹⁰⁸ Excerpts from Petro Shelest's diary shed light on Bil'ak's inner circle. When asked by Shelest "On whom can you rely in the struggle against the rightest forces? Who and where are your healthy forces?" Bil'ak provided a list of five individuals, D. Kolder, A. Indra, J. Lenart, J. Janik, and C. Cisar. See Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet -Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968," 238.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 236.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 237-38.

Interestingly, Shelest initiated the issue, repeatedly pushing Bil'ak for a letter requesting Soviet military aid. The "letter of invitation" was intended, not to provide legal justification for intervention, but to demonstrate a "credible commitment" by hardliners to form an alternative regime.¹¹¹ Shelest made the request for a letter to Bil'ak at a secret meeting between the two that began in the late evening of July 20 and ran into the early morning hours of the next day. Shelest told Bil'ak: "We need a letter from you containing your request for assistance." Shelest added, "For you, won't this provide a guarantee that you will be bolder and more organized in your struggle against the nefarious activities of the rightists, and won't it strengthen your actions?"¹¹² Shelest got his letter from a nervous Bil'ak on August 3 at the Bratislava conference and delivered it to an equally nervous Brezhnev. Brezhnev expressed his gratitude to Shelest by saying: "Many thanks to you, Petro; we won't forget this."¹¹³

Kadar, and Soviet Politburo members, Aleksei Kosygin (Prime Minister) and Mikhail Suslov (Central Committee Secretary), anchored the diplomatic camp of the policy deliberation process. Kadar was reluctant to resort to force largely because of bitter memories of the Soviet intervention in Hungary and because he was introducing his own market reforms (Hungarian New Economic Mechanism) and political liberalization at home.¹¹⁴ As Kadar confided to Czechoslovak leaders, Dubcek and Mlynar, "Success of the Czechoslovak reforms would undoubtedly mean new hope for developments in

¹¹¹ Ibid., 240.

¹¹² Ibid., 242.

¹¹³ Ibid., 244.

¹¹⁴ Vertzberger, 1998, p. 232.

Hungary.”¹¹⁵ At the secret meeting of “five” in Moscow, May 8, 1968, Kadar argued on behalf of Dubcek, concluding that, “there is no counterrevolution underway in Czechoslovakia.”¹¹⁶ Kadar supported military exercises, but felt that Dubcek could be relied upon to reign in the counterrevolutionary forces. By late July, Dubcek’s failure to attend the July Warsaw meeting (for fear that he would not be allowed to return to Czechoslovakia) and lack of firm actions caused Kadar to lose confidence in him and start to actively move towards the interventionist camp. In fact, Kadar orchestrated the final secret meeting between Shelest and Bil’ak on 20-21 July where Shelest pressured Bil’ak for the “letter of invitation.” Kadar told Shelest prior to the rendezvous with Bil’ak, “It’s too bad that the Czechoslovak comrades so far don’t understand or don’t want to understand the full seriousness and, above all, the danger for the KSC and their whole country.”¹¹⁷ In the early morning hours on the shores of Lake Balaton, Hungary, Shelest told Bil’ak, “Your request for assistance might come too late. We need an appeal today.”¹¹⁸

Kosygin and Suslov had less at stake, personally, than the leaders directly threatened by spillover effects and/or loss of organizational power, and therefore remained the most objective throughout the deliberations. Kosygin (as with his argument with Andropov at the July 19 Politburo meeting) at times vehemently countered the

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 27.

¹¹⁶ *Minutes of the Secret Meeting of “Five” in Moscow, May 8, 1968 (Excerpts)*, Document No. 31, Navratil, 137.

¹¹⁷ Quoted from Petro Shelest’s diary translated in Kramer, “Ukraine and the Soviet -Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968,” 241.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

interventionists.¹¹⁹ But, his position fluctuated over the course of the deliberations and Kosygin ultimately succumbed to the pressure of the hawks. At the Cierna discussions just 10 days later, Kosygin went on the attack against Dubcek.¹²⁰

Mikhail Suslov played a role reminiscent of his activities in the Hungarian crisis. In 1956 he had been repeatedly sent to Hungary to provide first-hand accounts of the situation for the Soviet Politburo. Because Suslov's assessments, at the time, were more favorable than Andropov's and others, he was accused of providing "calm reassurances" while "the situation deteriorates." One Soviet hardliner had complained during the deliberations of 1956 that the "American secret services are more active in Hungary" than Comrade Suslov.¹²¹ Suslov took a similar "calm reassurance" approach throughout the Prague Spring crisis. Although critical of the developments in Czechoslovakia, Suslov was the staunchest holdout for a political solution.

Dubcek, drawing his own lessons from the events in Hungary and Poland in 1956, strove to mollify Soviet concerns through continuous verbal reassurances that Czechoslovakia—despite the radical reforms—would remain a committed partner in the Warsaw Pact. Dubcek and other key Czechoslovak leaders had concluded that the Soviets would tolerate internal reforms as long as Warsaw Pact membership was not questioned. Dubcek, aware that the interventionists held firmly to the Hungarian analogy, went to great lengths to dispel that perception. At Cierna, he skillfully outlined the differences between the events of Hungary in 1956 and the Prague Spring,

¹¹⁹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, 256.

¹²⁰ *Speeches by Leonid Brezhnev, Alexander Dubcek, and Aleksei Kosygin at the Cierna nad Negotiations, July 29, 1968 (Excerpts)*, Document No. 65, Navratil.

¹²¹ Kramer, 1998, "1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland" 186.

endeavoring to convince the Soviet leaders not to think of the two in the same context.¹²²

Dubcek garnered little support, though. Whether or not he had drawn the correct lesson from 1956, Dubcek failed to grasp that actions ultimately spoke louder than words. The rapid progression of Prague Spring events without firm braking from above led Soviet and bloc leaders to increasingly doubt the hallow reassurances.¹²³

Although Brezhnev refrained from taking a hard policy stance throughout most of the deliberation process, he nonetheless exercised decisive influence.¹²⁴ Brezhnev primarily approached the decision process as a consensus-builder rather than a policy advocate, taking advantage of the few who cautioned against intervention to extend the process of coercive diplomacy. Starting at the secret meeting of "five" in May, Brezhnev outlined his middle-of-the-road approach that carried the deliberations through July. Appearing conciliatory relative to the interventionist fervor of Ulbricht and Gomulka, Brezhnev closed the meeting with these words: "Clearly we can agree, and I hope [Comrades] Ulbricht and Gomulka also agree, that at the given moment we will not mount an attack on the new [Czechoslovak] leadership as a whole. First it is necessary to see what they do, how they address the people, and how the people and army respond to this."¹²⁵ Here is where Dubcek failed to harness the important lessons from 1956. As the Polish crisis progressed, Gomulka had taken a more pro-Soviet public stance denouncing the radical reformists...Dubcek had not. In addition, Gomulka had readied his nation for

¹²² Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 189.

¹²³ Kramer, "The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine," 135-37.

¹²⁴ See H. Gordon Skilling's Foreword in Navratil, 1998, xviii.

¹²⁵ *Minutes of the Secret Meeting of "Five" in Moscow, May 8, 1968 (Excerpts)*, Document No. 31, Navratil, 143.

a fight against the Soviets...Dubcek had not. Brezhnev demonstrated his patience, caution and desire for a political way out by evoking the Polish analogy in discussions as late as June of 1968;¹²⁶ but Dubcek's lack of public resolve, impending time constraints, and Soviet domestic political pressures ultimately left Brezhnev little wiggle room to avoid intervention. Brezhnev's growing irritation with Dubcek and his "socialism with a human face" movement is best highlighted by the question he posed to Dubcek in the halls of the Kremlin: "What's with this human face? What kind of faces do you think we in Moscow have?"¹²⁷

By August, time had become a major constraint in the decision process. The Soviets viewed the forthcoming Fourteenth Party Congress, scheduled for September 9, 1968, as the absolute deadline for crisis resolution. By that point they surmised that all "healthy forces" in Czechoslovakia would likely be removed from power, democratizing Czechoslovak communism beyond repair.¹²⁸ Prior to that, "there were two important intermediate dates: August 20, when the Czechoslovak Presidium was to meet, and August 26, when the Slovak Party Congress was scheduled to convene."¹²⁹ The Presidium session provided optimal timing for intervention because all of the top Czechoslovak officials would be in one place and could easily be rounded up, minimizing the potential for organized resistance.¹³⁰ In addition to the time constraints imposed by

¹²⁶ Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 167.

¹²⁷ Oldrich Cernik's *Recollections of the Crisis (Excerpts)*, Document No. 104, Navratil, 424.

¹²⁸ See Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts. *Czechoslovakia 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 103; Andrew and Gordievsky, 486; and Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 235.

¹²⁹ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, 235.

¹³⁰ Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," 2.

the upcoming meetings, the costs of military mobilization could not be sustained indefinitely. The extensive troop deployments and exercises had brought the military plan, "Operation Danube-68," to a state of readiness by the end of July. A "plan of such scope was bound to acquire a momentum of its own."¹³¹ The mobilization exacted a great toll on Soviet and bloc societies, meaning that the state of readiness could not be maintained indefinitely.

The narrowing deadlines only exacerbated the political pressure on Brezhnev. Although he was clearly in control of Politburo deliberations, Brezhnev was not immune to domestic politics. The power and passion of the hard-line camp ultimately convinced Brezhnev that inaction on his part could lead to "forced retirement from his post."¹³² Khrushchev's fall was partly attributable to his inability to please military hardliners—one lesson from the past that was not lost on Brezhnev.¹³³ Brezhnev later confided in Mlynar: "If I had not cast my vote in the Politburo in favor of military intervention...perhaps I would not be sitting here."¹³⁴ The growing stress and demands for action enhanced the salience of and dependence on the Hungarian analogy. Brezhnev consequently "reframed" his perception of the crisis based on often-distorted information about the situation in Czechoslovakia, internal political pressure, confidence in the military option, and the time urgency posed by approaching critical dates.¹³⁵ The Hungarian analogy won out in the bargaining process and the Hungarian solution—

¹³¹ Windsor and Roberts, 102.

¹³² Quoted in Valenta, *Anatomy of a Decision*, 187.

¹³³ Schmid, 137.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Valenta's Response to Karen Dawisha, "The Limits of the Bureaucratic Politics Model: Observations on the Soviet Case," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 300-346.

¹³⁵ Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*.

military intervention—was approved. The decision to invade was made on August 17, 1968. Warsaw Pact armies rolled into Czechoslovakia on August 20 to coincide with the Czechoslovak Presidium.

Summary

The August 17 Politburo decision to militarily intervene in Czechoslovakia was the result of a complex interaction of national, organizational and individual interests and perceptions—perceptions shaped by manipulated information, personal persuasion and analogical reasoning. Realist-based concerns about the security of the western Soviet flank and political/ideological spillover effects of the Prague Spring rightfully demanded attention and action by Soviet and bloc leadership. The question that framed the ensuing six-month deliberation process was what form that action would take—diplomacy or military intervention.

The KGB and military played significant roles in the decision process. Driven by strategic and organizational interests, the KGB controlled and manipulated vital information, planted caches of U.S.-made weapons, stirred internal provocations, and propagandized—all in effort to paint the Prague Spring as a Western-influenced counterrevolution as threatening as Hungary, 1956. For their part, the military—motivated by similar interests—advocated military intervention, extended military exercises in and around Czechoslovakia, initiated invasion plans, and presented the Politburo with a significant path dependency—thousands of mobilized troops.

Security concerns and organizational constraints certainly impacted the decision process, but it was the experiences of 1956 that thoroughly pervaded the policy deliberations. All of the critical actors were intimately involved with the events in Poland and Hungary in 1956. While the facts on the ground may have better aligned with the circumstances surrounding Poland in 1956 rather than Hungary, the Hungarian image dominated deliberations—largely because those in control of vital information purposely reinforced that analogy. Analogical reasoning provided both the framework for analysis and ultimately the model for action. The 1956 Hungarian model of consultation with other bloc members, justification based on the identification of counterrevolutionary forces, and legitimization in the form of an invitation from within the country for military aid was followed with uncanny precision.

In the end, positive realist-based cost-benefit calculations, the power of analogical reasoning, the manipulation of internal and external assessments, the vociferous advocacy of most bloc leaders, the path dependency created by the mobilization and deployment of forces, and the reluctance of Dubcek to make radical conciliations (as had Gomulka in 1956) all left Brezhnev little choice but to intervene. Anything less would have been political suicide. Besides, there was no “Hungary” developing to divert attention and military resources, thereby saving face.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Why do states choose to militarily intervene in an international crisis? Why do states choose a specific method of military intervention when they do intervene? The Bay of Pigs and Czechoslovak cases indicate that despite significantly different political systems and governmental structures, the basic determinants of military intervention—as delineated in the integrated Allisonian construct—are reasonably consistent between the two superpowers. The relative influence of the component realist, organizational and individual factors varied to some degree, but all affected the decision process in similar and important ways.

Comparative Analysis

The decisions to intervene in Cuba and Czechoslovakia were initially driven by rational concerns over strategic interests. After early favorable assessments, both the U.S. and Soviet Union came to perceive the actions of the Castro and Dubcek regimes as real threats to their regional hegemony. In the Cuban case, Castro threatened U.S. strategic and economic interests through his internal communist reforms, sponsoring of communist incursions throughout the region, and increased ties to the Soviet bloc. A Soviet surrogate ninety miles of the U.S. coast was deemed unacceptable. Likewise, the Prague Spring presented similar, yet more pronounced security concerns for the Soviets.

The potential defection of Czechoslovakia from the communist bloc threatened not only the security umbrella the Soviets had painstakingly built after World War II, but also the entire political/ideological foundation of the communist system. Losing Czechoslovakia would expose the Soviet western flank, jeopardize their conventional and nuclear defense strategy, and encourage similar reforms in other communist bloc countries and the Soviet Union itself. The Soviets concluded that they could not stand idly by and allow that to happen.

In both cases, realpolitik spurred interventionary impulses. Realist-based perceptions of threats to national interests and favorable power dynamics led Eisenhower initially to conclude that the U.S. should intervene in Cuba to change the Castro regime, and the Soviet Politburo to decide to intervene in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia to secure its place in the Soviet bloc. But, those realist-based perceptions did not arise in a vacuum. They were introduced, manipulated and championed by the intelligence agencies—CIA and KGB—that controlled vital information and advocated for intervention from the start. These and other important factors only come to light when the cases are examined at the organizational and individual levels of analysis.

The CIA and KGB were both motivated by strategic and organizational interests. Their perception of threats to regional hegemony led to an “ends justify the means” mentality. Due to the covert nature of the Cuban operation, the CIA enjoyed a virtual monopoly over critical policy information. They—particularly Dulles and Bissell—presented Castro as a serious threat, called for his elimination, and provided the solution. Once the wheels were set into motion Bissell was determined to see it through and used

all of the organizational tools available to persuade the president to do the same. The same men that planned the Bay of Pigs operation held the intelligence necessary to judge its chances for success and consistently painted the strength of the Castro regime and readiness of the exile forces in pro-interventionary terms.

On the Soviet side, Andropov painted a similar pro-interventionary picture for the Politburo, but was motivated by different organizational interests. He had no ownership of the solution like the CIA, but was organizationally threatened by the continued elimination of hard-line KGB action channels in Czechoslovakia and the potential for fallout back home. While the CIA primarily influenced deliberations by "spinning" the intelligence in a positive light, the KGB took it a step further. They actively ignited internal provocations, fabricated counterrevolutionary evidence and destroyed intelligence to the contrary. In the end, though, both intelligence communities leveraged their organizational capabilities and power to manipulate perceptions in favor of military intervention.

Whereas the CIA and KGB played similar roles in the two deliberation processes, the Soviet and American militaries did not. The U.S. military had little at stake in the Cuban crisis. The Cuba problem presented no direct threats to organizational interests and the CIA-led covert operation only entailed minimal military support. Although interested in assuring military viability, the military leaders quietly acquiesced in the end to the bureaucratically stronger CIA. In contrast, the Soviet military closely mirrored the KGB's hard-line intervention fervor. Like the KGB, strategic and organizational interests were threatened by the events of the Prague Spring. Soviet military action

channels within Czechoslovakia were also under attack by the reformists. More importantly, strategic military plans for the deployment of Soviet nuclear forces on Czechoslovak soil were threatened by the regime's calls for a nuclear-free Central Europe. Without direct Soviet military control in Czechoslovakia the Soviets would not be able to complete the nuclear umbrella. With critical strategic and organizational interests at stake, it is no surprise that the Soviet military championed the military solution. They had long sought a permanent presence in Czechoslovakia and intervention was the sure-fire way to guarantee it. The military influenced the policy deliberations through direct persuasion—targeting the special political relationship developed with Brezhnev, and by presenting the Politburo with a formidable path dependency in the form of thousands of bloc troops deployed in and around Czechoslovakia.

Like the 1400 trained and anxious Cuban exiles seeking to free their country in the Bay of Pigs case, the massive mobilization of Soviet and bloc troops around Czechoslovakia presented Brezhnev with his own “disposal problem.” Kennedy could not politically afford to disband the exile brigade for fear that he would be labeled a coward; yet he could not keep them mollified much longer. Likewise, Brezhnev and the Politburo recognized that demobilizing the Soviet troops would send a strong signal to the entire bloc that Soviet leaders lacked the fortitude to act; yet extending the deployment indefinitely would require costly logistical support and expend political capital. The path dependencies generated by previous decisions—whether their own or not—severely constrained the decision contexts for Kennedy and Brezhnev.

Those decision contexts were also highly structured by analogical reasoning. Reasoning by historical analogy significantly influenced policy deliberations in both cases, but not entirely through the same mechanisms. In the Bay of Pigs case, reasoning by analogy operated predominantly at the organizational level after Eisenhower departed. The CIA was fully entrenched in the Guatemalan mindset. The successful operation to overthrow Arbenz in 1954 became the model for action in terms of intervention type and the model for expectations in terms of presidential commitment. Success breeds complacency and hubris and Dulles and Bissell were no exception to the rule. Their aura of invincibility bolstered their persuasive power in the policy deliberations, but few others shared their Guatemalan mental construct. Kennedy and his new team of advisors lacked the same experiential framework since most were not around at the time of the Guatemalan intervention. Where reasoning by analogy infiltrated the Bay of Pigs decision process in its own covert-like fashion from the bottom up, it overtly guided the Soviet policy deliberations from top to bottom.

Reasoning by analogy pervaded all levels of the Soviet policy process with the key organizations and all of the primary individual actors having direct experiential ties back to the events of 1956. The deliberation process represented an extended battle of analogies with the hard-line interventionists evoking images of Hungary while moderates clung to the Polish analogy. In the end, the political and perceptual power of those embracing the Hungarian analogy won out and the Hungarian solution was imposed on Czechoslovakia. Throughout both cases it is evident that the dominant analogies gained a political life of their own that long outlived the factual similarities with the crises at hand.

That political life was the partial result of the pulling and hauling of individuals with diverse personal and organizational interests. The Soviet and U.S. intervention decisions reflected similar underlying political persuasion dynamics, but the decision construct for Brezhnev was, in a way, simpler than that for Kennedy. The extended Soviet deliberation process centered primarily on whether or not to militarily intervene; the details of the potential military intervention seldom entered the discussions. The leaders of the KGB, Soviet military, and those bloc countries threatened by spillover effects championed the full-scale use of force. Brezhnev and the few Politburo moderates delayed the decision hoping for a diplomatic outcome. But in the end, all of the critical interests aligned on one side or the other of the simple intervention dichotomy.

Because of more diverse competing interests, the U.S. deliberation process was more nuanced, expending nearly as much political capital on the nature of the intervention as on the decision to intervene. Between the CIA advocates for action and the advisors aligned against intervention, there was another political camp—grounded in the State Department—that emphasized plausible deniability. The concern over plausible deniability inherently drove the deliberations into the “how to” of the intervention, creating a more complex decision construct for Kennedy.

Ultimately, though, the decision to intervene rested on the shoulders of one individual. The two cases highlighted that although realist, organizational, and individual factors did significantly structure and constrain the decision context, the final intervention decision came down to Kennedy and Brezhnev. It was the alignment of their

personal/domestic political interests with the available policy options and cognitive constructs that resulted in the final decisions to militarily intervene. Kennedy's domestic political concerns and reputational interests led him to internalize competing issues—the disposal problem and plausible deniability. Consequently, he chose to intervene—ridding himself of the disposal problem—but to do so in a way that traded increased military risk for reduced political risk. Deniability ultimately trumped viability. Drawing from the lessons of the downfall of Khrushchev, Brezhnev felt enormous domestic political pressure to appease the military hardliners. In the end, Brezhnev's job security became inextricably linked with the military solution. The decision to intervene was not taken lightly by Kennedy or Brezhnev. Each was pressured to act by externally imposed time constraints—the growing discontent of the exile brigade and approaching rainy season for Kennedy, and the extended troop mobilization and upcoming Party Congress for Brezhnev. Each leader extended the deliberation process to the limits of those constraints.

In summary, the decisions to intervene in the Cuban and Czechoslovak crises were the result of complex decision processes that evolved over time and were impacted at multiple levels of analysis. Comparative analysis through process tracing demonstrated the explanatory power of the modified Allisonian construct. While the realist, organizational, individual, and cognitive factors were not surprisingly weighted differently for the two different decision contexts, all of those factors directly affected the decision outcomes in predictable ways. Divergences in shared historical intervention

experiences and levels of organizational and individual interests at stake largely shaped the different weighting of policy factors.

The key to this military intervention construct, versus Allison's original three models, lies in the integration. The case analyses highlight the difficulty in easily categorizing intervention factors into any one model. This is where much of Allison's criticism was targeted—something belonged in Model II not Model III, etc. That debate becomes mute in this research approach because the factors are not presented as competing, but fully integrated. As such, one would expect bleed-over from one level of analysis to another as evidenced in the two cases. More so, process tracing provided insight into the mechanisms through which that happened.

The Power of Past Experiences

What particularly stands out in this analysis is the power of the one factor Allison omitted—reasoning by analogy. The past intervention experiences of both the Soviets and Americans highly structured the cognitive constructs that drove policy deliberations. Analogical reasoning guided both the questions of *whether* to intervene and *how* to intervene—directly reflecting the two research questions posed here. Past lessons linked perceived interests to policy preferences by providing mental causal models.

That phenomenon did not end with the Bay of Pigs and Czechoslovak interventions, though. In fact, as those operations came to a close they then became important lessons of the past for future superpower crisis deliberations. The Bay of Pigs is particularly telling because that unmitigated military and political disaster was

immediately followed by several important crisis decisions. Contrary to intervention successes—which tend to lead to complacency, increase confidence in the use of force, and constrain the search for policy options—failures have the opposite effects. Policy failures tend to constrain intervention behavior by increasing perceived risk (decreasing confidence) and expanding policy option search because of the desire to avoid repeating a failed strategy.

All of those tendencies came to light in the critical U.S. intervention deliberations that followed on the heels of the Bay of Pigs. The devastating failure had the most immediate effect on the decision *not* to intervene in Laos. Between 1954 and 1961, the U.S. considered Laos the key to Southeast Asia. “Laos was Vietnam before there was a Vietnam.”¹ Eisenhower, on his way out of office, warned Kennedy in January 1961 that Laos was the most vital security issue confronting the United States.² In March 1961, Kennedy emphasized the importance of Laos in the Soviet-American confrontation to the American public in a televised speech. “[B]randishing a wooden pointer at large maps of Laos,” Kennedy forcefully depicted the communist aggression, convincing many that American troops would soon be deployed.³ The Kennedy administration had considered military intervention throughout the spring of 1961. Military leaders presented the president with intervention options ranging from the simple movement of troops to Thailand to the deployment of a hundred thousand combat troops to Laos, South

¹ Karabell, 206.

² Ibid.

³ Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth. McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 201.

Vietnam, and Thailand.⁴ It was not the careful weighing of those policy options, though, but the lack of confidence—resulting from the Bay of Pigs—that precluded intervention. Arthur Schlesinger noted that Kennedy came to a meeting waving cables from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding an invasion of Laos and remarked, “If it hadn’t been for Cuba, we might be about to intervene in Laos.”⁵ The president added, “I might have taken this advice seriously.”⁶ Kennedy had lost confidence in the advice of the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff and was not willing to risk another covert operation, let alone a large-scale intervention.⁷

Due to the tremendous strategic interests at stake, President Kennedy was not able to avoid dealing with the Cuban missile crisis, though. The Bay of Pigs experience can be largely credited for the expanded and more deliberate search for policy options during the missile crisis. Kennedy, vowing not to repeat the policy formulation and evaluation mistakes of the Bay of Pigs, created the Executive Committee (ExCom)—an ad hoc group of advisers from different branches of government—to perform an integrated policy assessment. “Kennedy quickly established a *modus operandi* and ground rules for the deliberations of the ExCom that greatly facilitated performance of the critical ‘search’ and ‘analysis’ phases of policy analysis before the final ‘choice’ was made.”⁸ The

⁴ John Garofano, “Deciding on Military Intervention: What Is the Role of Senior Military Leaders?” *Naval War College Review* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 53.

⁵ Schlesinger, 338; Garofano, 53-54.

⁶ Ibid. In an interview for the *New York Times* in July 1962, President Kennedy said that the Bay of Pigs “invasion did some good. If it wasn’t for that we could be in Laos now...” quoted in Higgins, 174; Bobby Kennedy also later confirmed that, “if it hadn’t been for the Bay of Pigs, we would have sent troops into Laos.” Quoted in Bird, 202.

⁷ See Ernest May, *Lessons of the Past*, 89-90, for a discussion of how the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion led Kennedy to pursue a negotiated compromise in Laos.

⁸ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 212.

genesis of ExCom lay in the Taylor Commission investigation into what went wrong at the Bay of Pigs. General Edward G. Lansdale, then Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations—and later lead on Operation Mongoose—recalled that he was questioned specifically about the executive decision-making process. He noted that Bobby Kennedy was particularly concerned about “getting good service in the way of information and full details of alternatives” for future policy decisions.⁹

Having impacted the risk calculation associated with the decision not to intervene in Laos and influenced the enhanced policy search process for the Cuban missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs fiasco also touched the Johnson administration during the Dominican crisis. Why when faced with similar, but less severe, threats to hemispheric interests as in Cuba, did Johnson opt for a full-scale overt military intervention in the Dominican Republic? As Hybel noted, one important reason for the different intervention approach is that developments in Cuba came on the heels of the success in Guatemala while those in the Dominican Republic came on the heels of the Cuban failure.¹⁰ As stated before, success leads actors to repeat previous actions, whereas failure encourages them to rethink their strategy. Just days after the Bay of Pigs failure, McGeorge Bundy drafted a memo titled, “Some Preliminary Administrative Lessons of the Cuban Expedition.” In that memo, Bundy noted two important lessons that later informed the policy deliberations on the Dominican crisis: “What is large in scale must always be open, with all the consequences of openness,” and “Success is what succeeds.” Bundy astutely

⁹ Lansdale, Edward G. “Oral History Interview,” by Dennis O’Brien for the John F. Kennedy Library, July 11, 1970, 17.

¹⁰ Hybel, 143.

realized that the size of the Bay of Pigs operation inherently nullified any notion of plausible deniability. He wrote, "It appears to be an inescapable conclusion that in peacetime conditions the United States cannot do things on this scale in private." In addition, he concluded that—most important of all—policymakers had lost sight of "the fundamental importance of success in this sort of effort (emphasis in original)."¹¹ With Johnson determined not to be the president to permit a "second Cuba" in the hemisphere, he chose to intervene with overwhelming overt military force following the prescription laid out by Bundy four years earlier.¹² The power that past intervention experiences wielded on crisis deliberations was clearly demonstrated through these varied "brinksmanship" era cases. But, what are the prospects for the modified Allisonian construct outside the confines of the Cold War superpower standoff?

Broader Implications

During the Cold War, realpolitik dominated interventionary impulses for both superpowers. Realist-based rational calculations of strategic interests, threats and opportunities, and power balances reasonably explained a superpower's interest in a given international crisis and the decision to intervene. But, the timing and manner of intervention was ultimately determined by more proximate organizational and individual factors. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the intervention dynamics changed with the changing world order. The ever-familiar bipolar confrontation gave way to a distinctly unfamiliar unipolar moment for the United States.

¹¹ "Some Preliminary Administrative Lessons of the Cuban Expedition," drafted by McGeorge Bundy, 24 April 1961, in Blight and Kornbluh, 266-269.

¹² Hybel, 170.

Russia no longer possessed the wherewithal to actively pursue interventions around the globe, focusing primarily on the internal struggles of the state. The United States, though—positioned as the only true remaining superpower—found itself at a strategic crossroads with no clear map to guide its way.

With the end of the Cold War, many thought that the demands for military intervention would certainly decrease in unison with reduced strategic threats, but just the opposite proved true. In fact, the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s was one of the busiest periods for U.S. military intervention. This poses two interesting questions. First, why? Second, does the modified Allisonian model help answer that question with the same explanatory power it wielded when looking at the Cold War era?

Several broad factors hint to the answers to those questions and indicate opportunities for further research. First, the change in structural polarity simply increased the U.S. ability to act. The absence of a strategic peer competitor provided the United States unprecedented freedom of action. Second, that newfound freedom of action allowed policymakers to pursue interventionary actions in support of broader interests and values. Realpolitik, while not dead, was no longer the primary motivator for military intervention. In this context, national interests may be viewed as a Maslow-like hierarchy. As lower level (i.e. basic) interests such as security and safety were confidently attained, the state was able to pursue higher-level interests such as humanitarian rights and the spread of liberal democracy. Finally, the dissipation of the structural restraints of the Cold War revealed unforeseen underlying global issues,

uncorked decades of pent-up frustrations, and unleashed a rash of ethnic and regional conflicts and corresponding humanitarian crises that competed for U.S. attention.

These factors reasonably explain the general increase in U.S. interventionary behavior during the 1990s, but do not provide insight into why the U.S. intervened in certain crises (like Somalia) and not others (like Rwanda). Here, I would expect the modified Allisonian construct to provide even greater explanatory power. My suspicion—and a hypothesis for further research—is that the expansion in potential ultimate causes inherently enhanced the significance of proximate causes. As the realist constraints waned and the potential opportunities for intervention increased, organizational and personal interests, processes and constraints gained greater significance in the crisis decision process. When faced with varied international crises that present little clear threat to national security interests, policymakers are likely to be more influenced by domestic organizational and political factors when considering military intervention. In addition, the uncertainty of the strategic environment likely enhanced the salience of reasoning by historical analogy. The more uncertain the problem, the more likely it is that the problem will be cognitively simplified through analogical reasoning.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 did not dramatically alter international power dynamics, as did the fall of the Soviet Union, but did drive the United States back to the foundational level of the Maslow-like hierarchy of state interests. National security was less “secure” than previously thought, and interventionary behavior returned once again to focus on crises that threatened strategic interests. Aside from the changing

power and threat dynamics that have altered the influence of *realpolitik*, the rest of the neo-Allisonian construct is likely as relevant—if not more—today as during the Cold War. Organizational processes and behavior still constrain the decision context.

Standard operating procedures, information control, and organizational capabilities continue to impact policy formulation and option assessment stages. In the end, though, the decision to intervene is the purview of individuals—with the president playing the central role—influenced by multiple interests, perceptions, and political pressures.

Reasoning by analogy pervades the process; it simplifies the complexity of the decision-making task by providing policymakers a causal model to mentally link interests with policy preferences.

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